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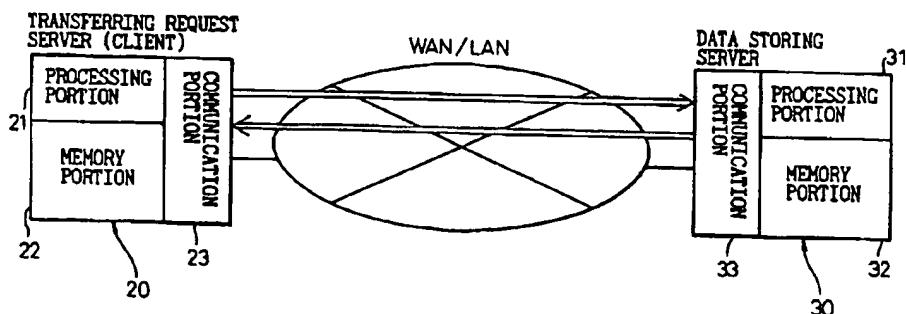
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(54) Abstract Title

Distributing intellectual property

(57) A distribution apparatus is used to distribute intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing. The distribution apparatus (30) has a memory portion (32) for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users, a processing portion (31) for providing a user with a service allowed for the user, and a communication portion (33) for automatically distributing the intellectual property. The distribution apparatus enables users to receive information about the intellectual property on time and to optimally share the intellectual property. It comprises a plurality of hierarchically managed servers and the intellectual property is only disclosed in an approved fashion.

Fig.9



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Fig. 1

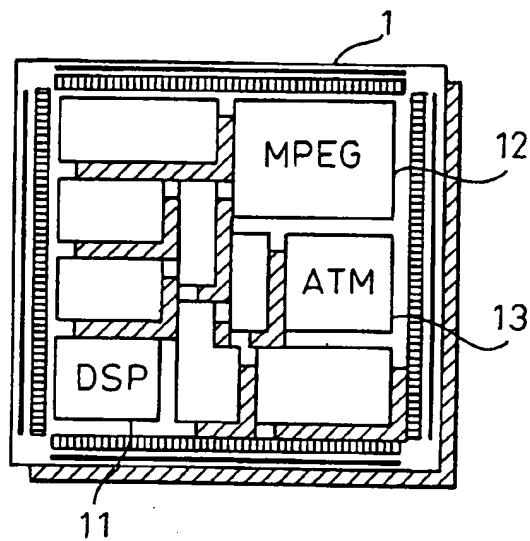


Fig.2

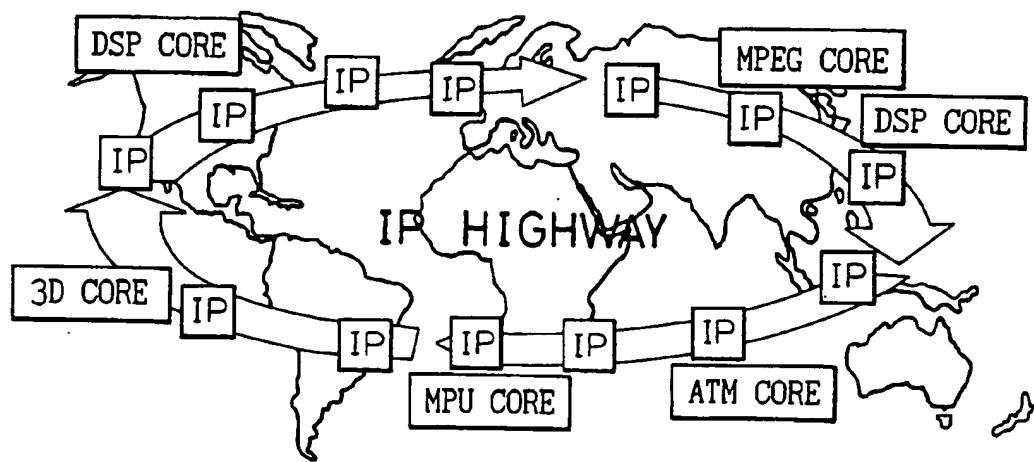
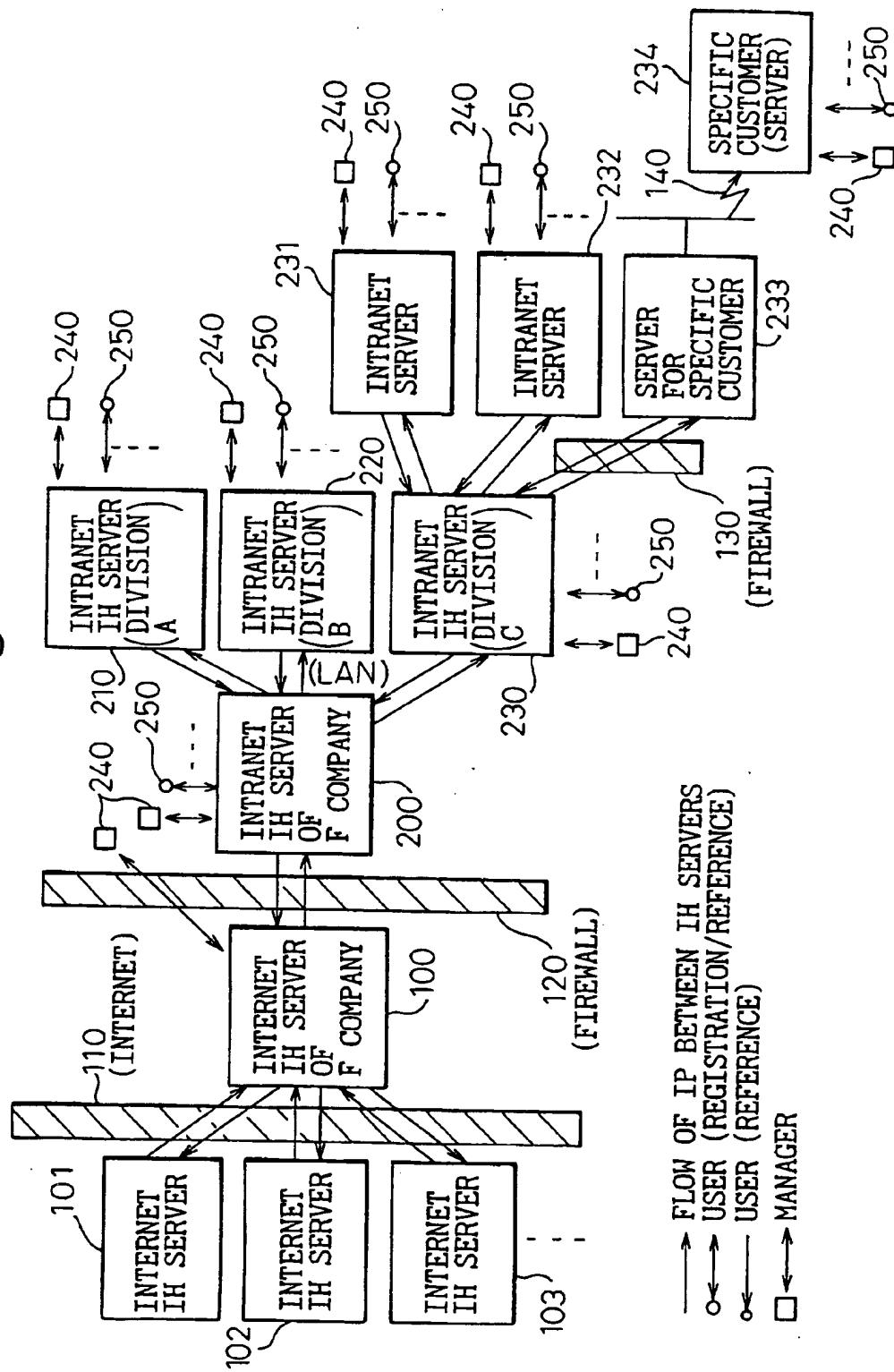


Fig. 3

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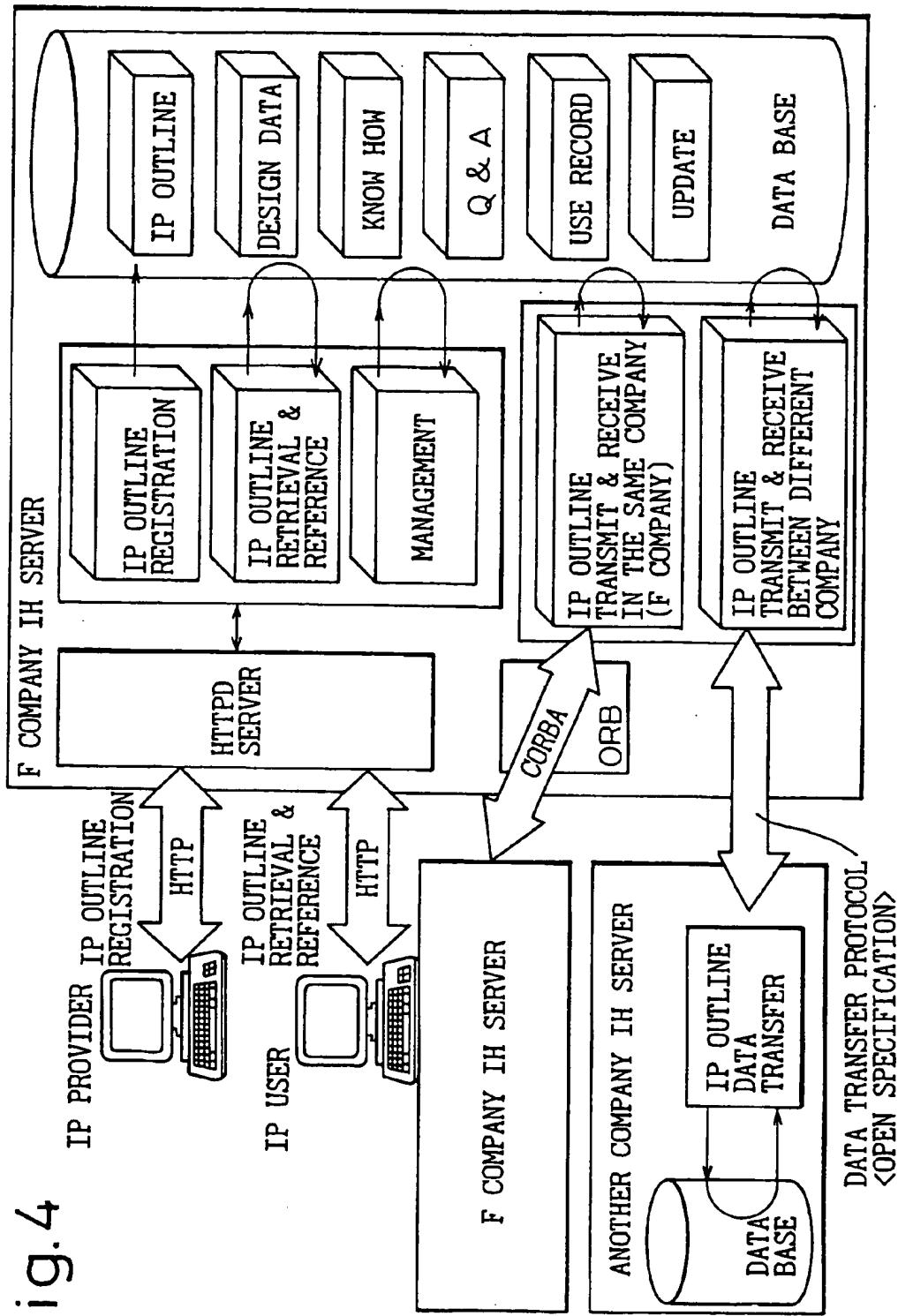


Fig. 5

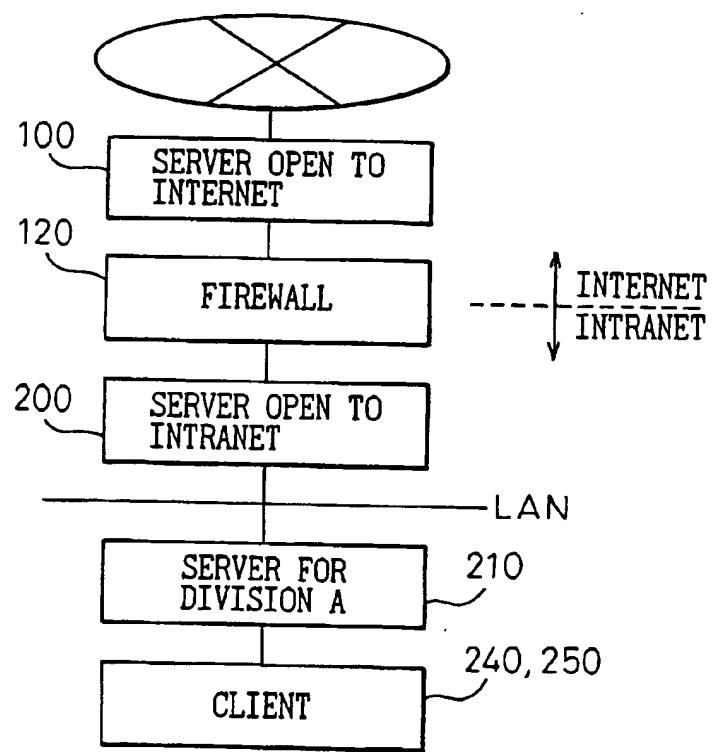
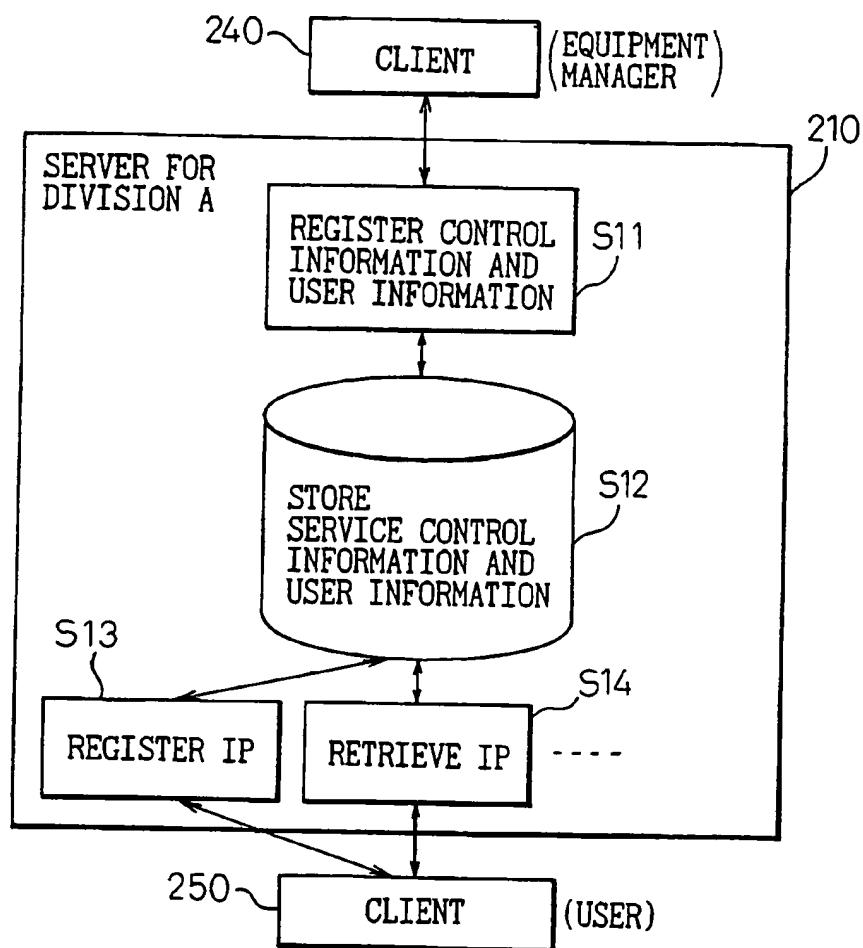


Fig. 6



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Fig. 7A

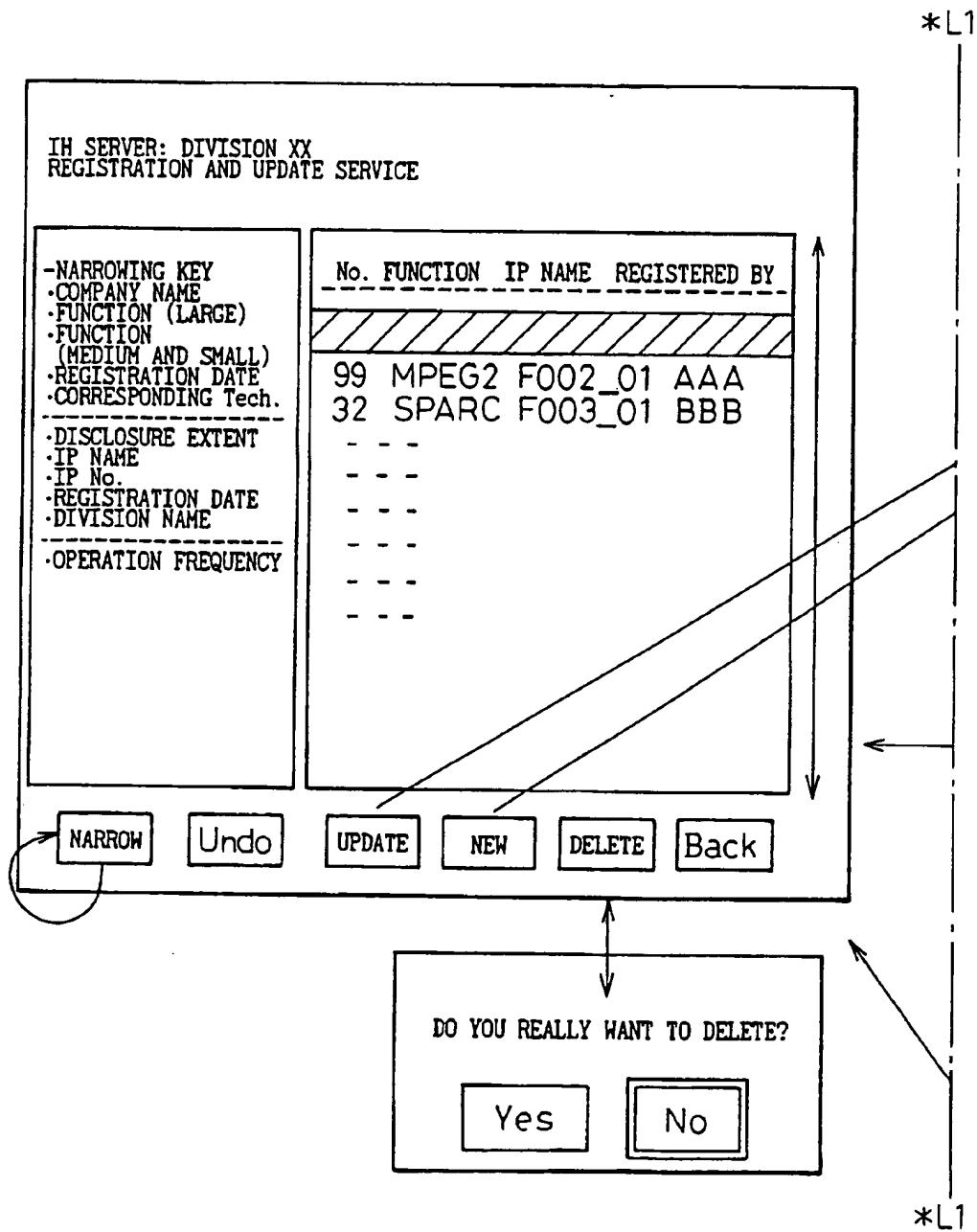
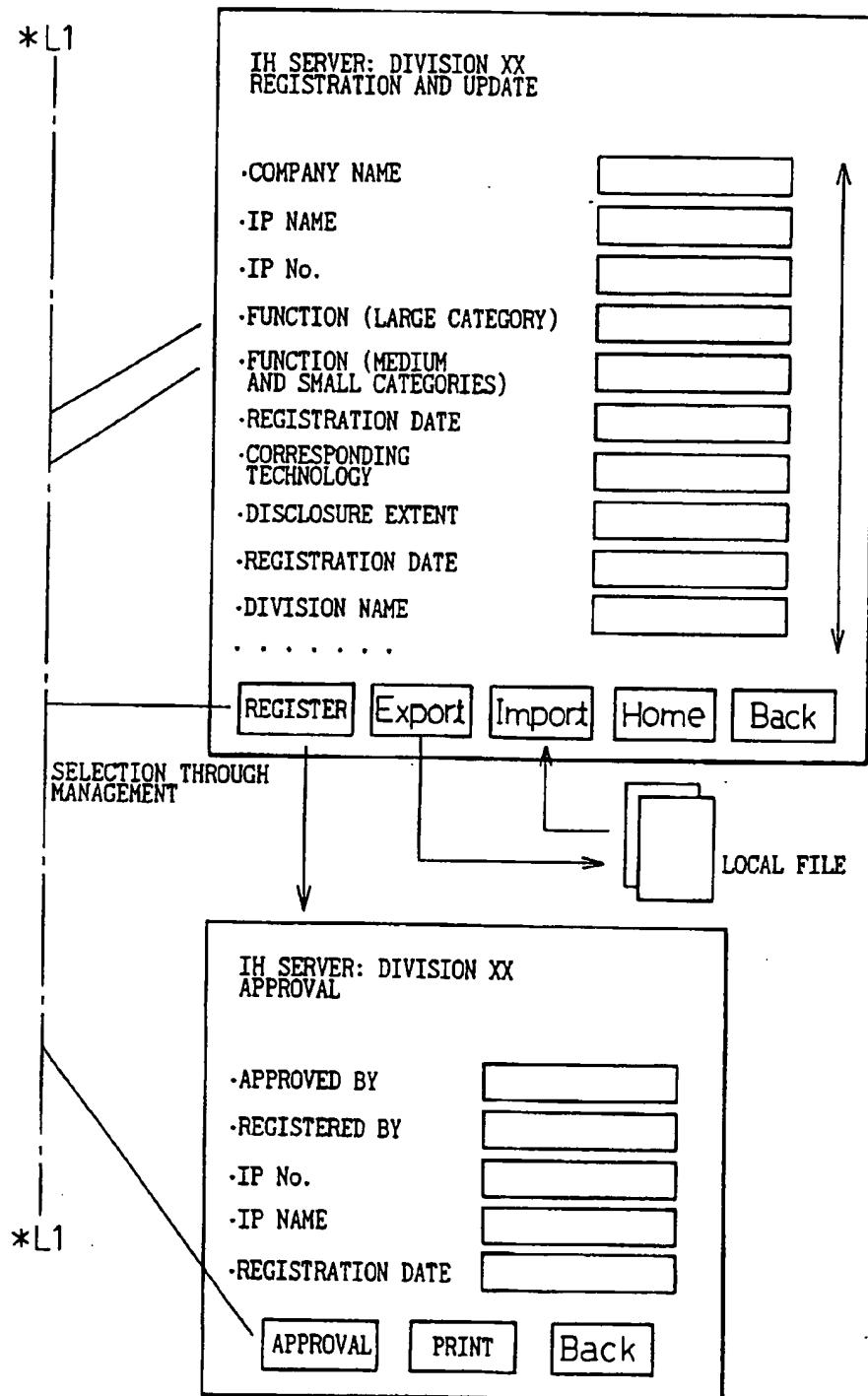
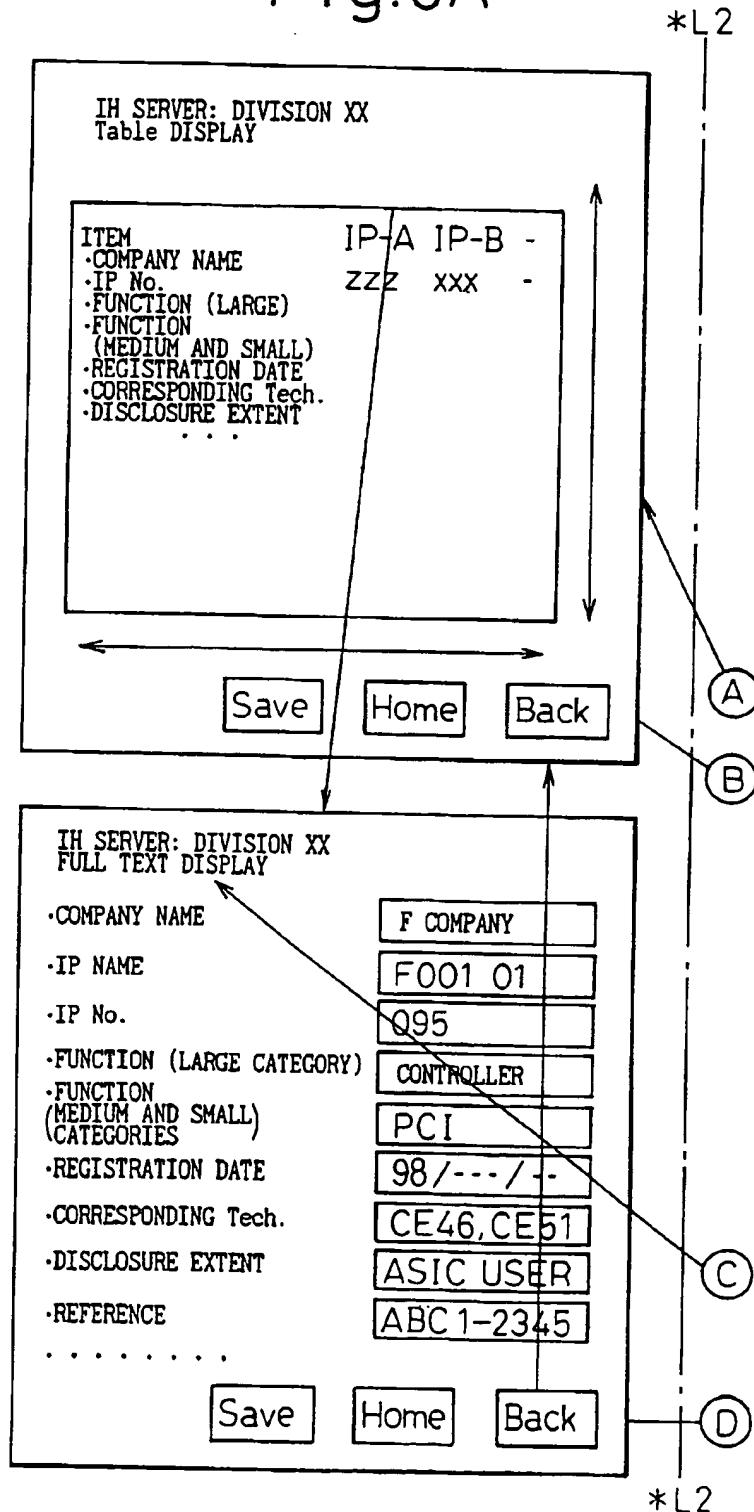


Fig. 7B



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Fig.8A



*L2

START PAGE

Fig. 8B

RETRIEVAL AND DISPLAY

DIVISION XX
WWW HOME PAGE
...
IP HIGHWAY
...

IH SERVER: DIVISION XX
DIRECTORY SERVICE HOME
•RETRIEVAL
•WHAT'S NEW

USER ID:
PASSWORD:

•IP REGISTRATION/UPDATE

USER ID:
PASSWORD:

•USER REGISTRATION
•IP PROVIDED BY F COMPANY

TO ANOTHER
SCREEN

IH SERVER: DIVISION XX
LIST OF COMPANIES

COMPANY	COMPANY	COMPANY
M	N	O
.	.	.
.	.	.
.	.	.

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*L2 *L3

L3

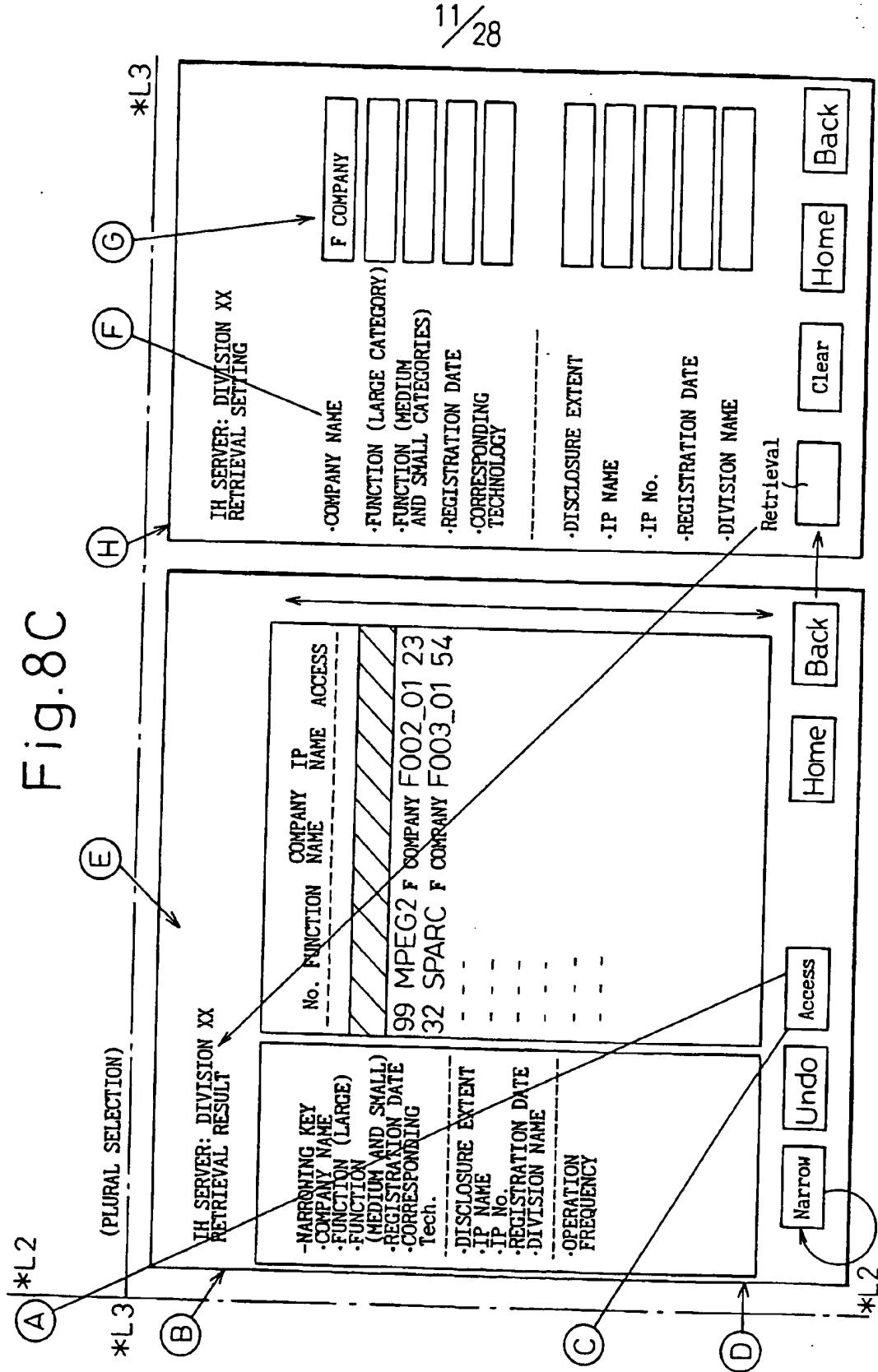
G

H

E

L2

Fig. 8C



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Fig.9

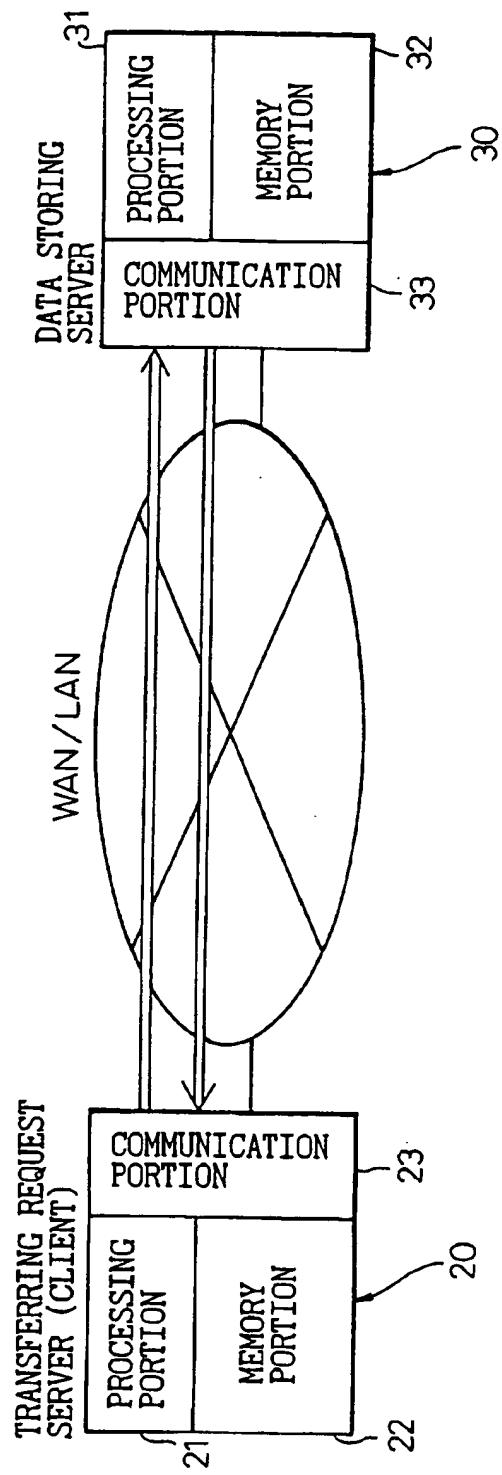


Fig.10

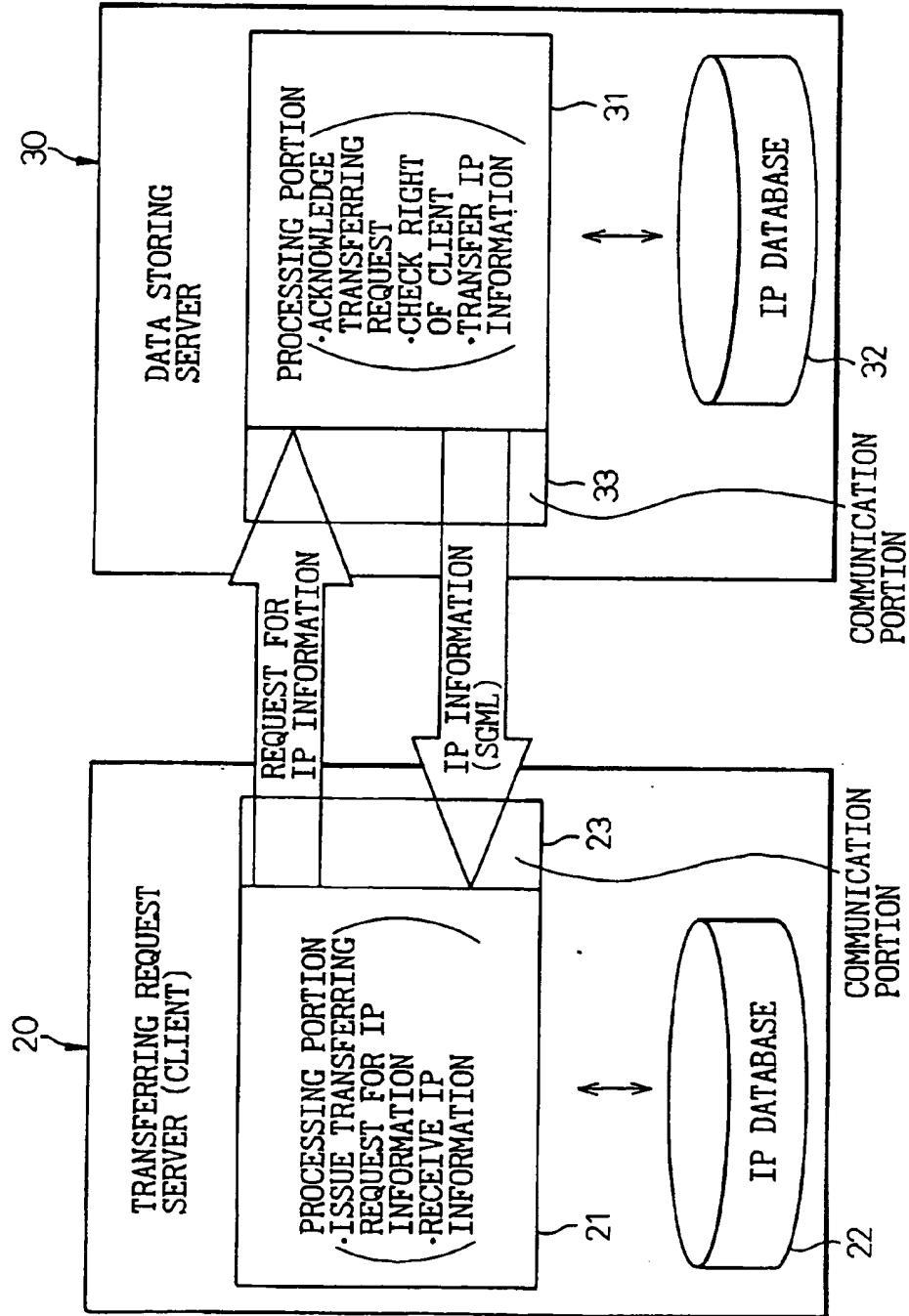


Fig.11

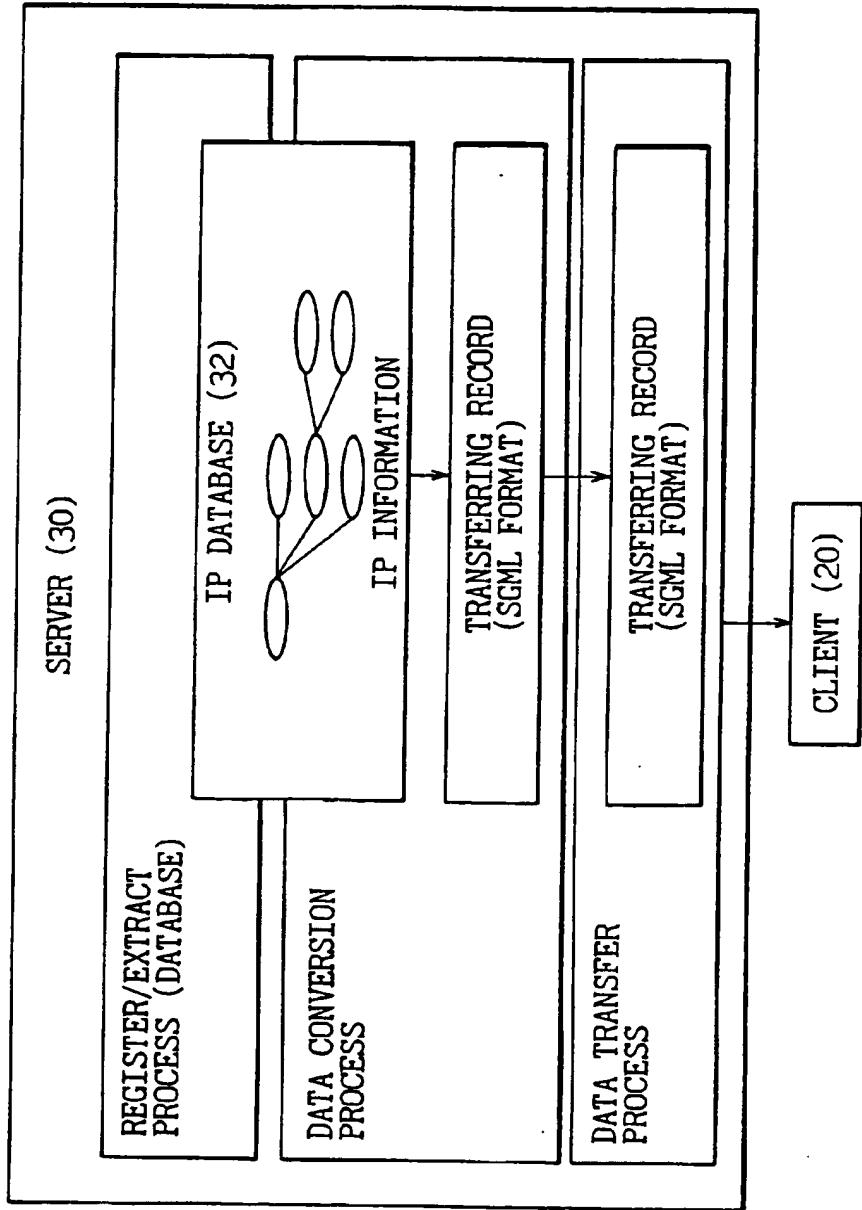


Fig.12

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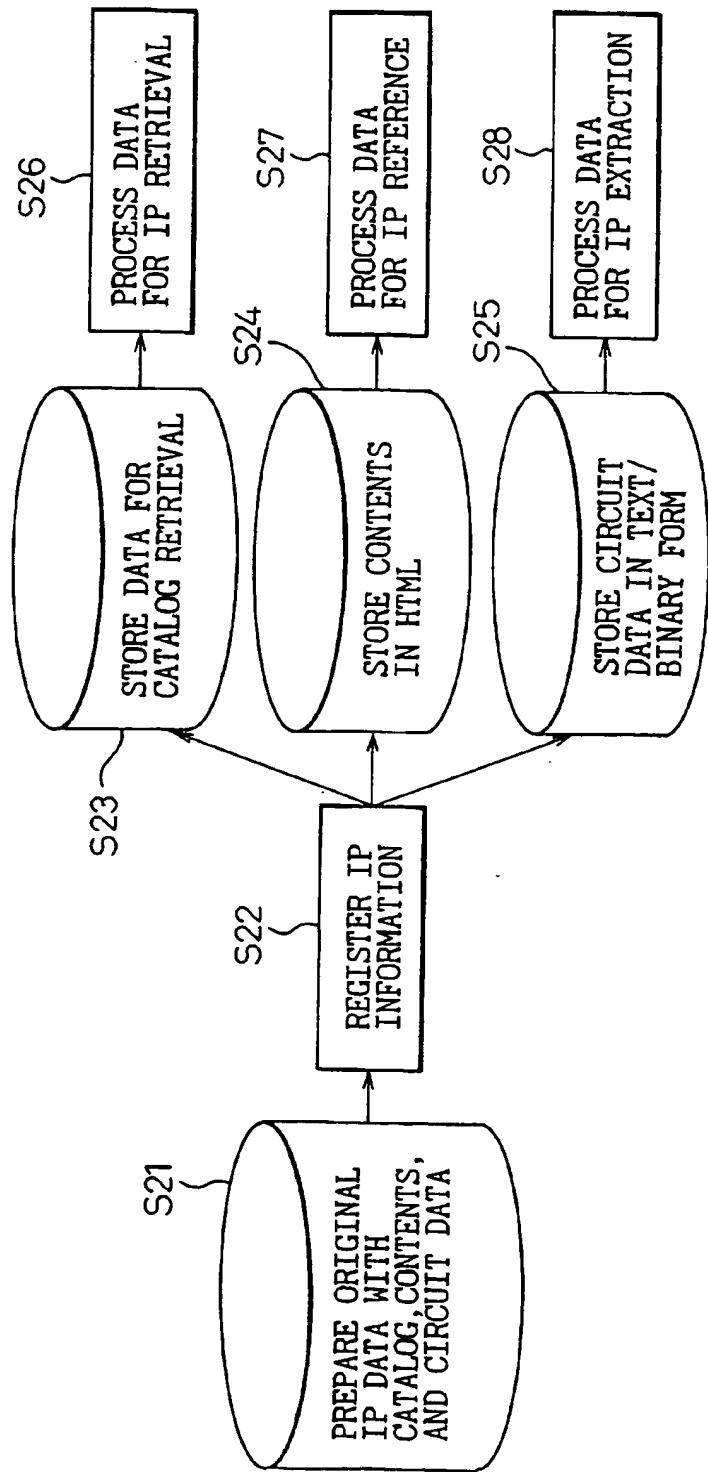


Fig.13

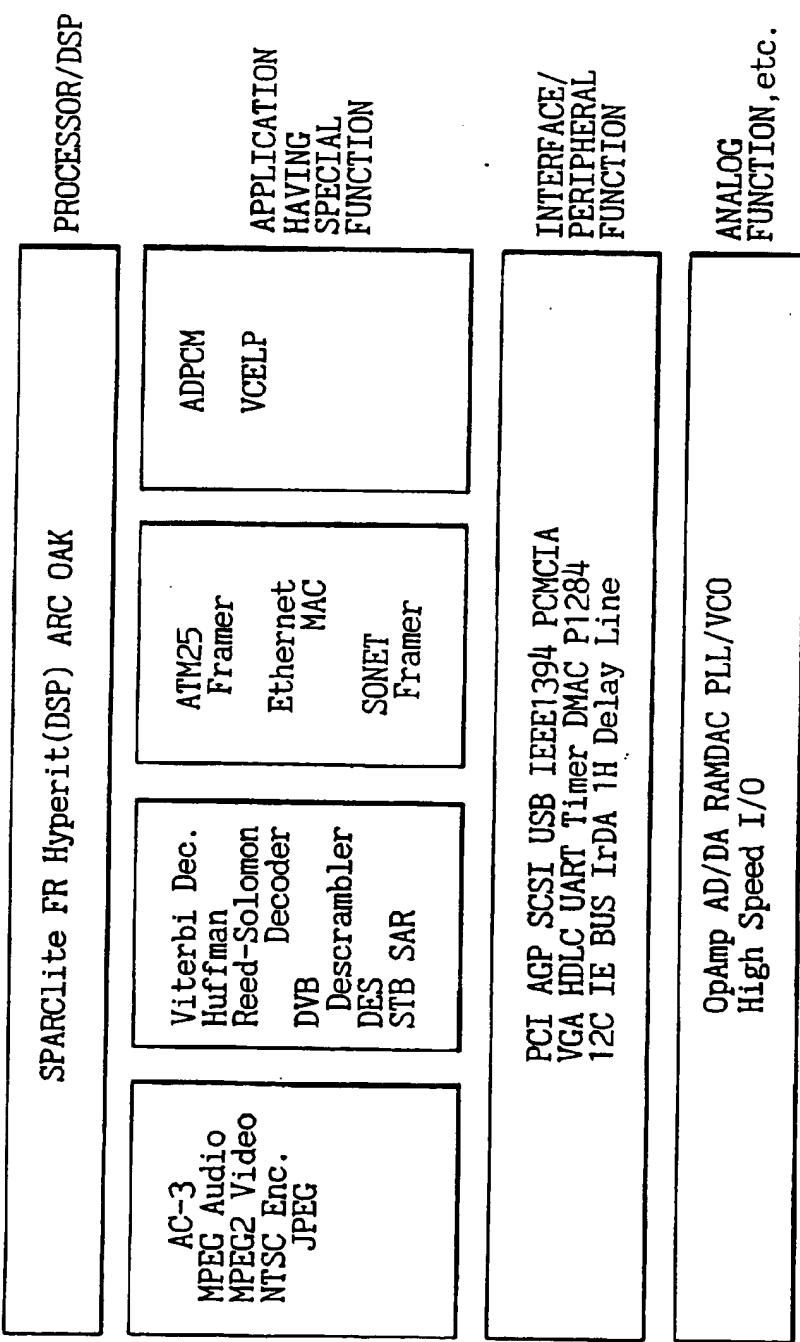


Fig. 14

17
28

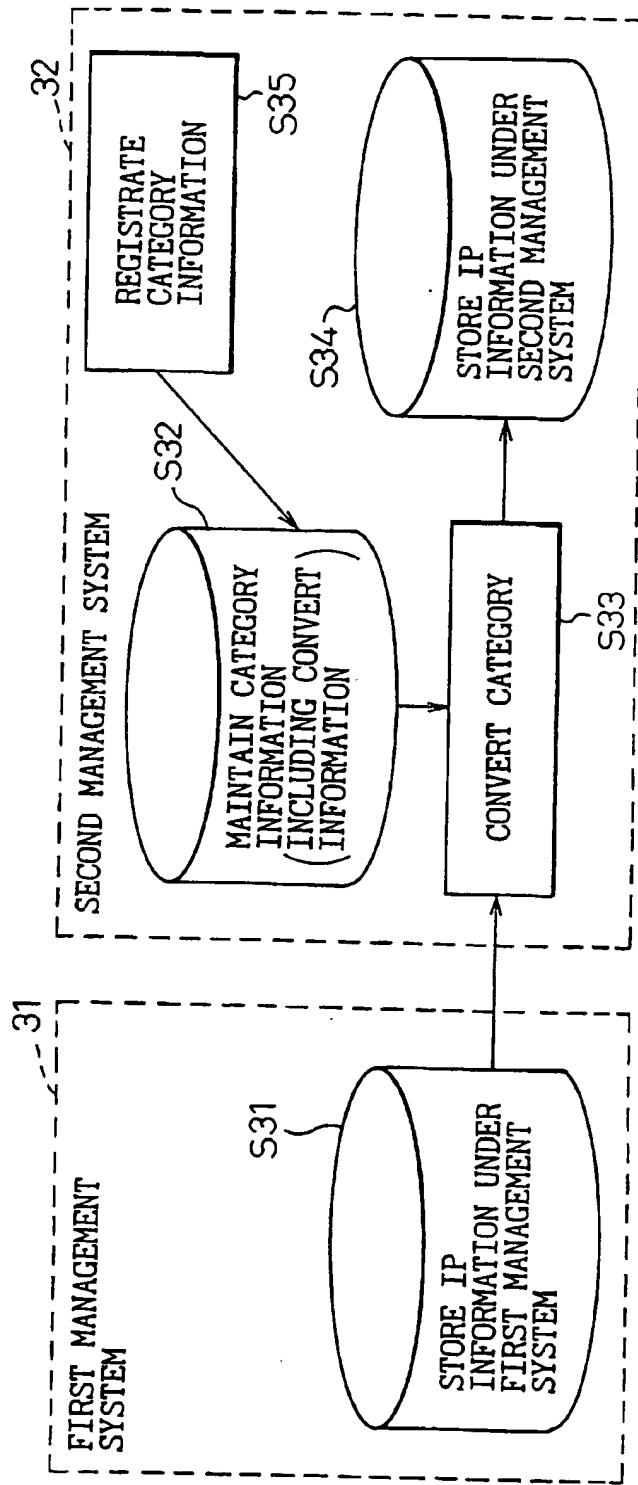


Fig. 15

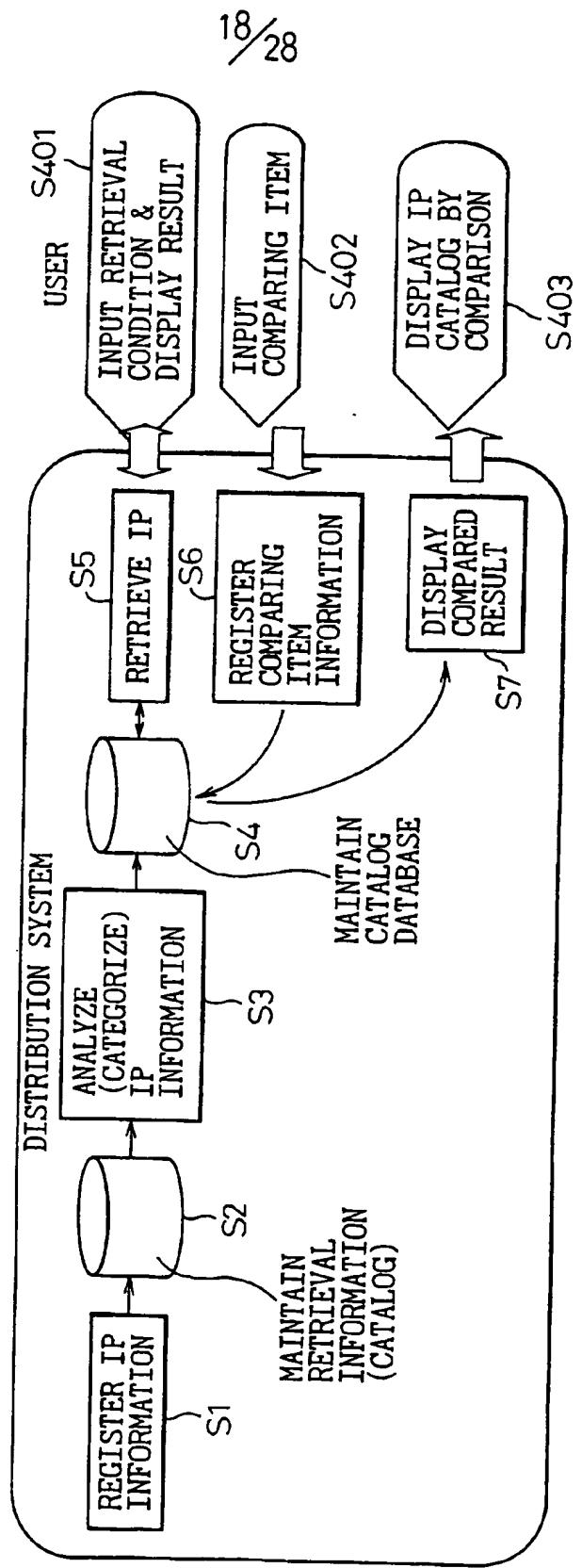


Fig.16

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	COMPANY NAME	A COMPANY	B COMPANY	C COMPANY
IP NAME	AIC-xxx	MDxxx	MBxxx	
FUNCTION	IEEE1394	IEEE1394	IEEE1394	
TRANSFER RATE	400M	200M	200M	
DISTRIBUTION LEVEL (DISCLOSURE EXTENT)	Logic Design	Logic Design	Logic Design	
REFERENCE	aa-aaa-aa-aaa	bb-bbb-bb-bbb	ccc-ccc-ccc	
URL	www.A.com	www.B.com	www.C.co.jp	
	<input type="button" value="Sort"/>	<input type="button" value="Cancel"/>	<input type="button" value="Detail"/>	

Fig. 17

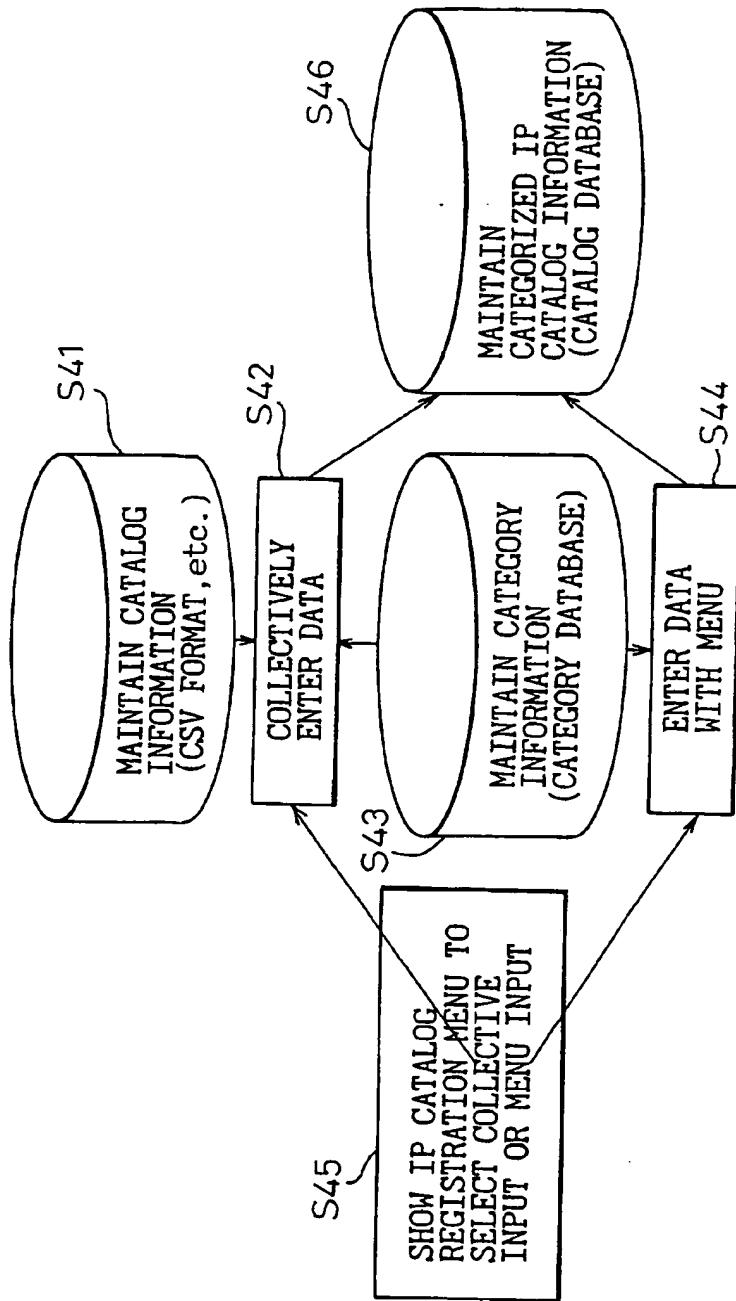


Fig. 18

21
28

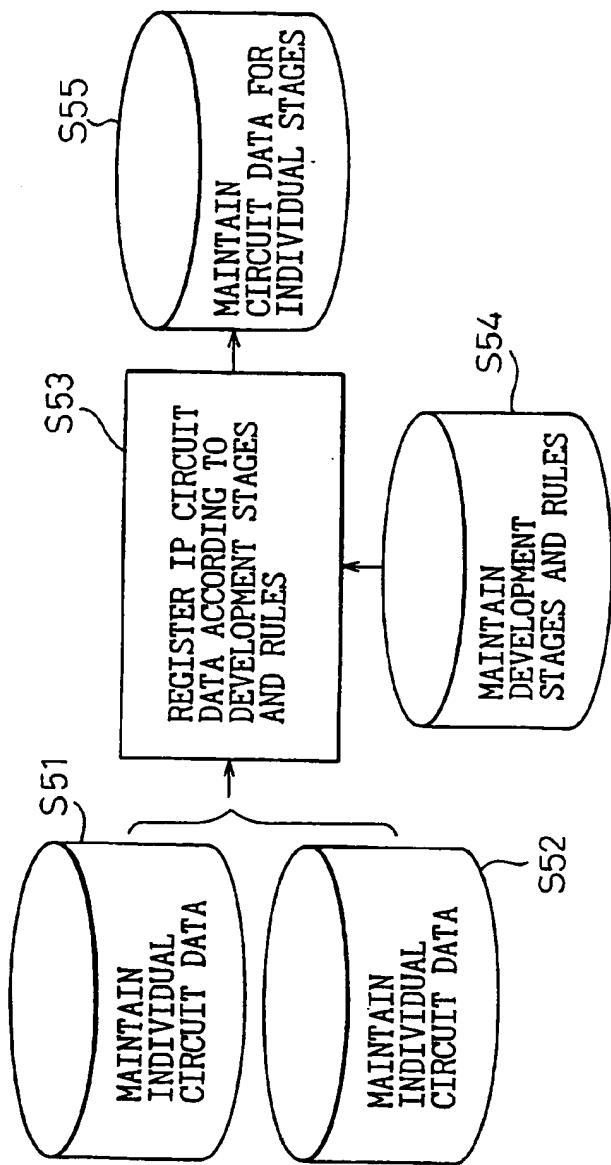


Fig.19

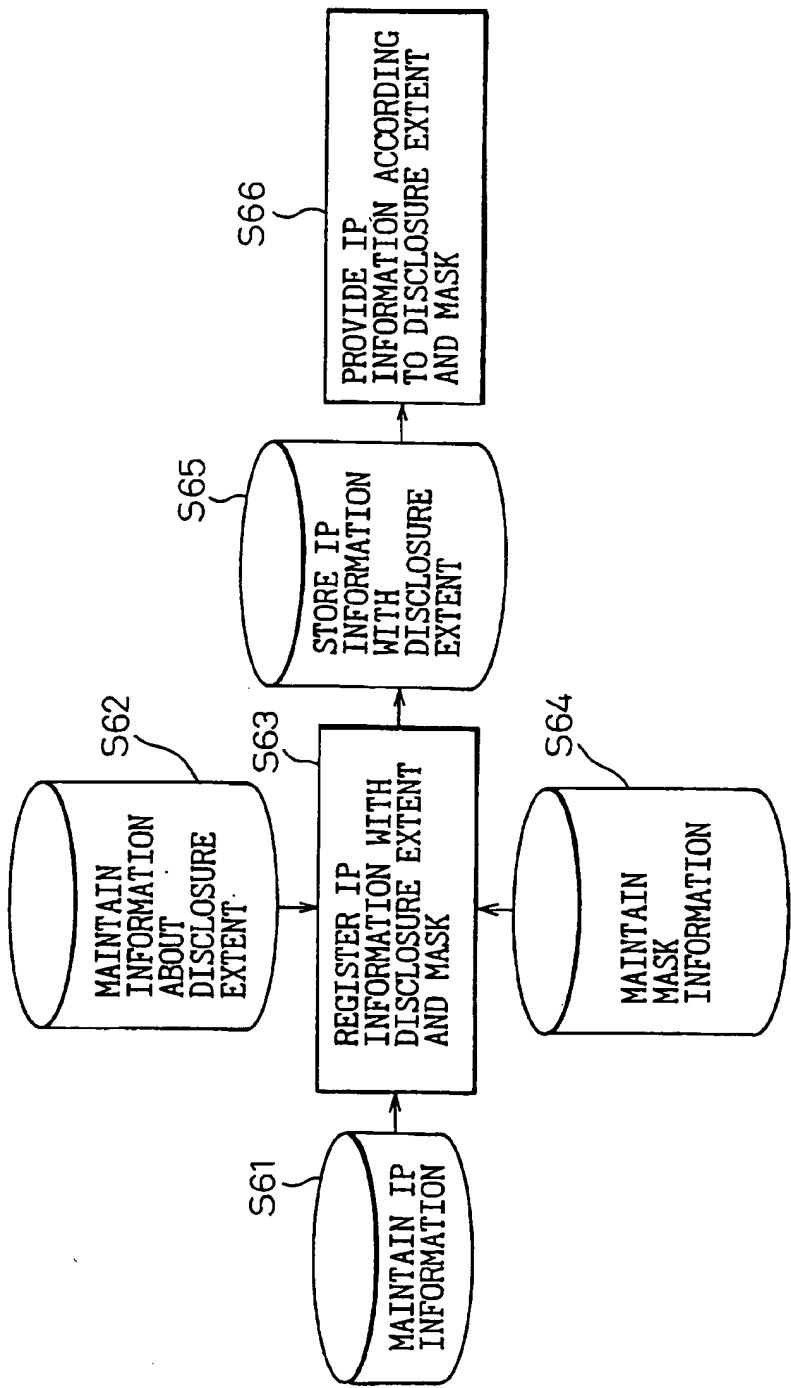
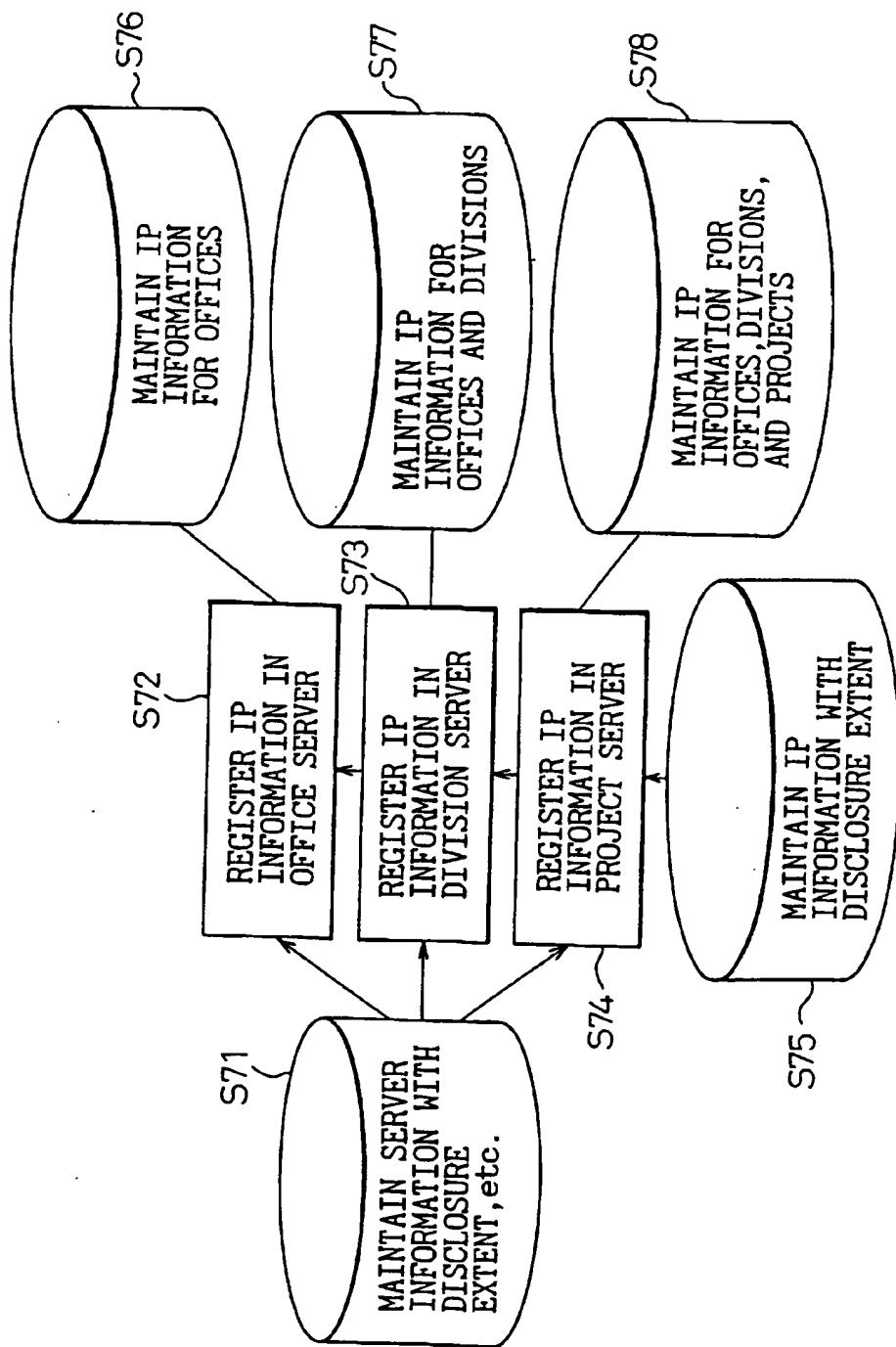


Fig. 20

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Fig.21

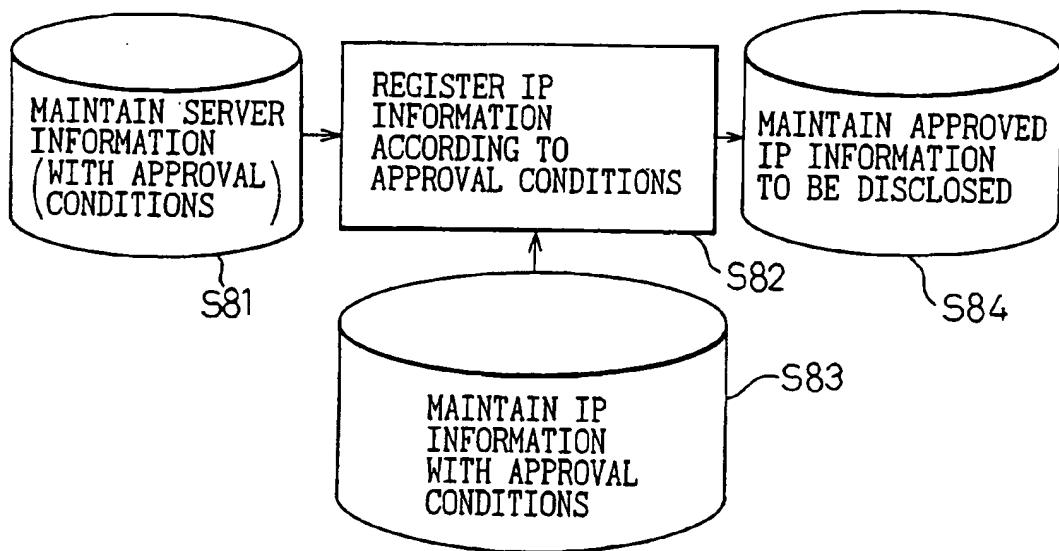


Fig.22

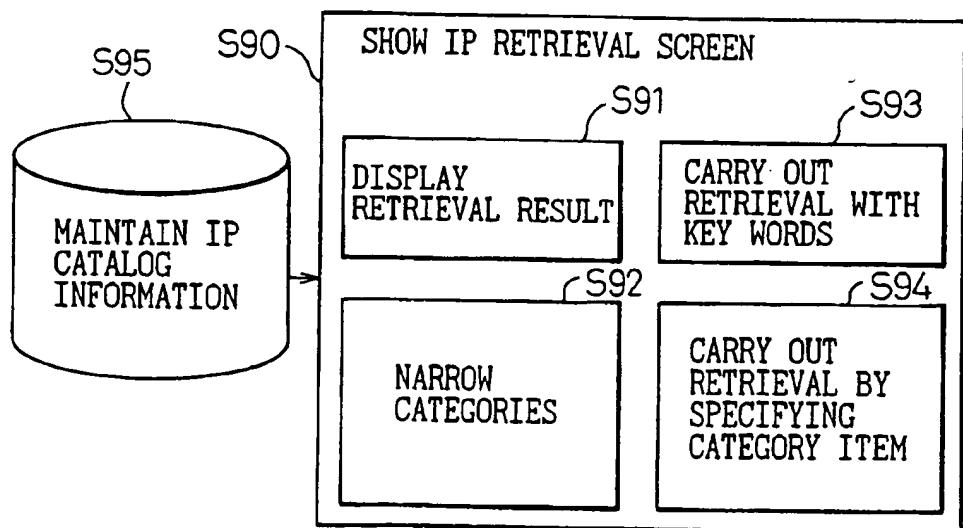


Fig.23

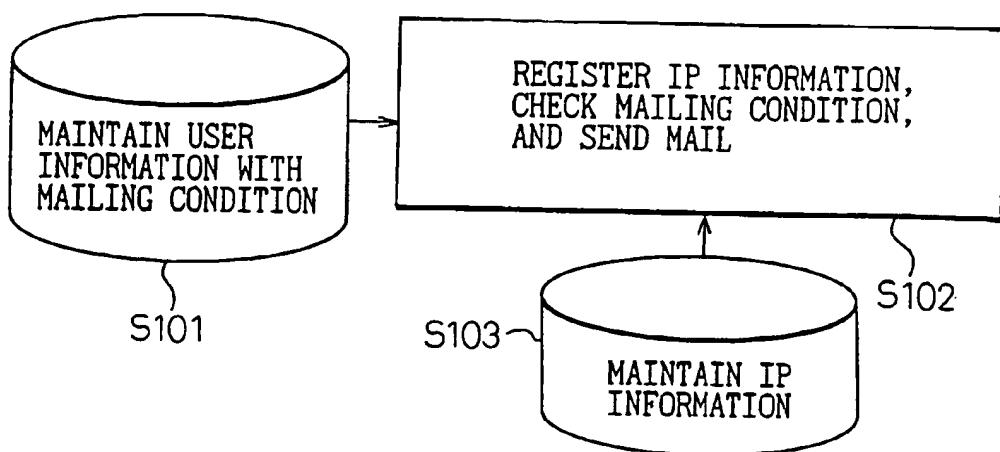


Fig.24

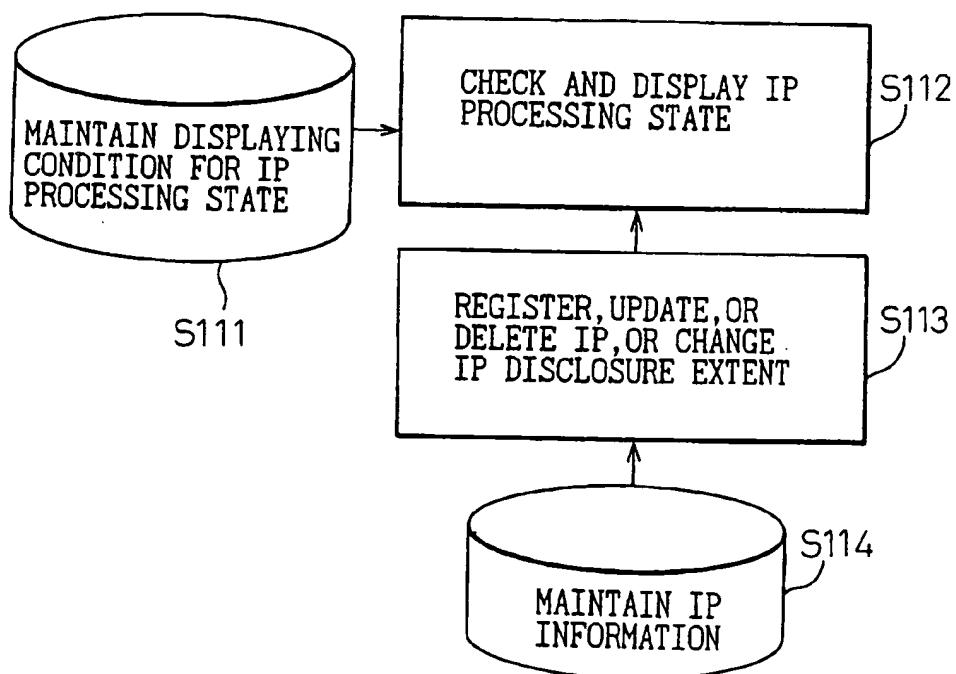


Fig.25

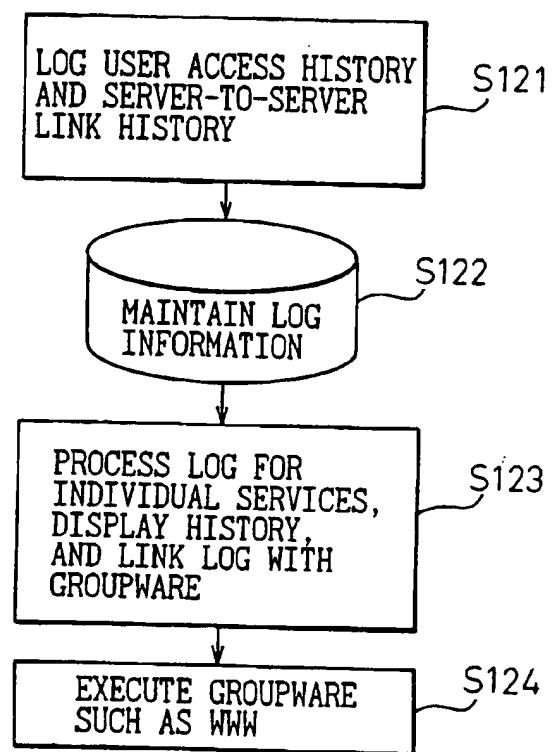


Fig. 26

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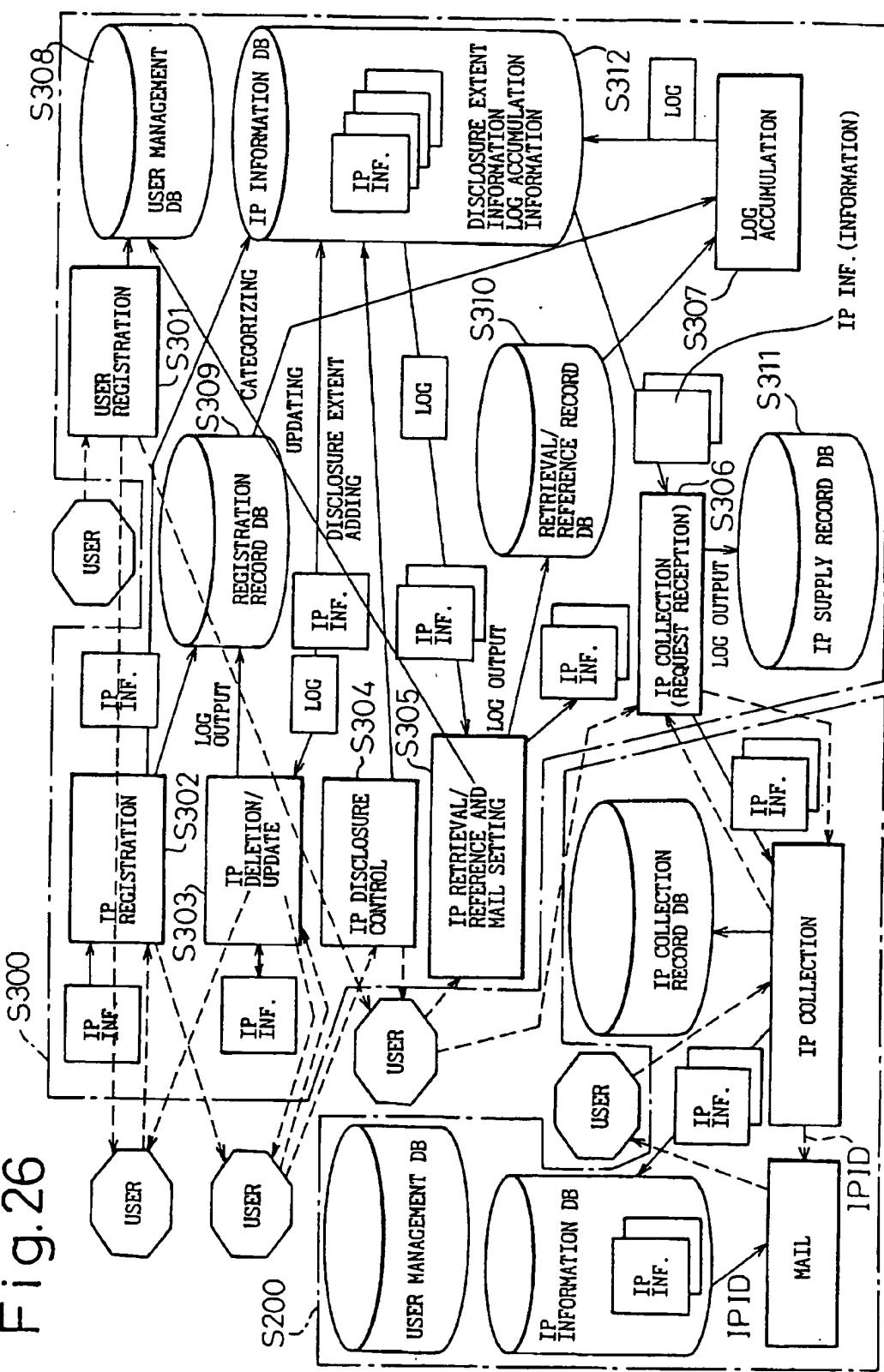
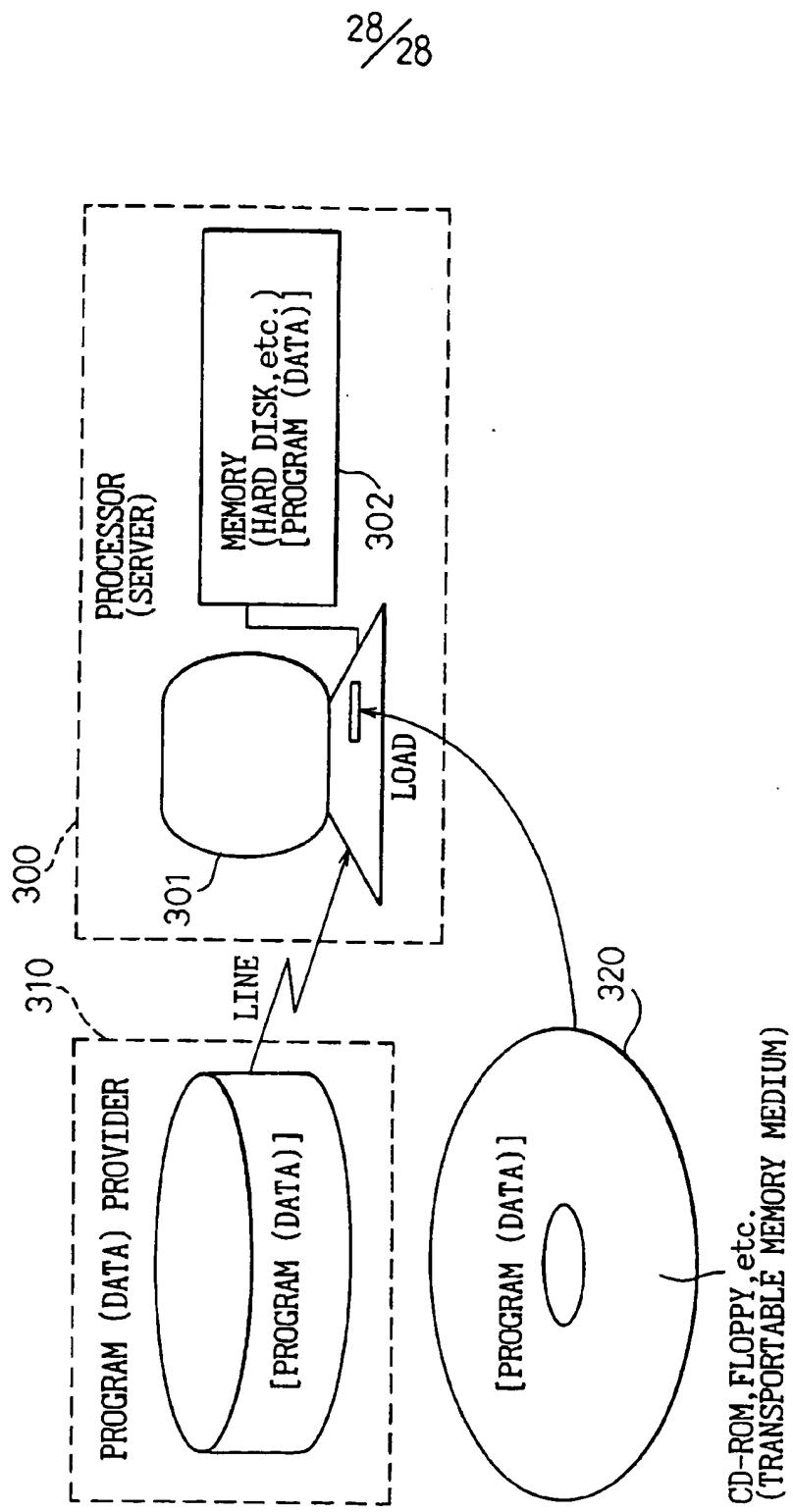


Fig. 27



METHOD, APPARATUS, SYSTEM, AND PROGRAM STORAGE
DEVICE FOR DISTRIBUTING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

5

10 The present invention relates to a method, apparatus, system, and program storage device for distributing intellectual property, in particular, to a system for distributing semiconductor design property (design information) through the Internet and intranets.

15 Recent improvements in the integration of semiconductor devices are raising problems of increasing the number of LSI manufacturing processes and prolonging the LSI development period. To solve the problems, it is important to reuse intellectual property (IP), in particular, semiconductor design property related to cores (megacells), circuit libraries, and software parts 20 for microprocessors for built-in units. To reuse the intellectual property, a system is needed for promoting the distribution thereof. In view of advancing network technology, what is needed is a system that uses the Internet and intranets to distribute intellectual 25 property.

30 Namely, to obtain intellectual property, one may get a printed catalog first, an explanation about detailed specifications second, and then circuit data stored in an electronic medium such as a floppy disk. Therefore, many steps and a long time are needed to get intellectual property. This hinders the reuse of intellectual property and the development of system LSIs.

35

It is desirable to provide a _____
distribution technique (method, apparatus, system, and

program storage device) for distributing intellectual property, in particular, semiconductor design property, so that users can easily re-use it. It is also desirable

5 to provide a distribution technique that realizes the maximum use of shared intellectual property.

According to an embodiment of a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a distribution apparatus for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor 10 product designing, comprising a memory portion for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users; a processing portion, connected to the memory portion, for providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and a communication portion, connected to the processing portion, for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

The memory portion may register control information about the services, retrieval information about the intellectual property, and extraction information about 20 the intellectual property. The intellectual property may include a catalog used when retrieving the intellectual property, contents effectively representing the intellectual property, and circuit data to be reused for designing a semiconductor product; and the registered 25 intellectual property may be processed according to the services so that the users can use the intellectual property.

The catalog may be processed and stored in the memory portion, and when a plurality of intellectual properties are obtained as a retrieval result, these 30 intellectual properties may be displayed by comparing items therebetween. The items may be determined by the user. The catalog may be registered collectively or through a menu according to category information, and the 35 intellectual property may be processed according to the category information. The circuit data may be prepared for each development stage of semiconductor products so

that a proper piece of circuit data may be reused for a given development stage. The circuit data may be registered according to registration rules that are set in advance.

5 The users may be divided into groups that are related to disclosure extents; and each piece of intellectual property may be registered with a disclosure extent so that each piece of the intellectual property may be disclosed to the users according to the disclosure extent. A catalog of a given piece of intellectual property may be registered with a mask that defines a disclosure extent of the catalog.

10 15 The memory portion may register category information for intellectual property so that the intellectual property may be distributed among different environments according to the category information. A retrieval operation on the catalog may be carried out by narrowing hierarchical categories related to the catalog and by specifying key words and at least one category item.

20 25 20 A mailing state may be registered at a specific occasion for each user to indicate whether or not information about the registration of intellectual property must be passed to the user; and mail may be sent to the user, according to the mailing state, on a specific occasion. Each piece of intellectual property may be registered with a display condition on a specific occasion so that the intellectual property may be processed and displayed according to the display condition. The specific occasion may be at the time of registering, updating and deleting the intellectual property, and the time of changing disclosure extents. A log of users who accessed the intellectual property may be collected; and the log may be processed and displayed according to users and may be automatically linked with groupware so that the processed log may be provided to the users.

30 35 According to an embodiment of a second aspect of the present invention, there

is also provided a distribution apparatus for distributing intellectual property, to be reused for semiconductor product designing, comprising a registration means for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users; an execution means for providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and a distribution means for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

Further, according to an embodiment of a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a distribution system having at least one server for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, wherein the server comprises a memory portion for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users; a processing portion, connected to the memory portion, for providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and a communication portion, connected to the processing portion, for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

The distribution system may comprise a plurality of servers that are hierarchically managed; and information about the servers may be registered with hierarchical information and disclosure extents so that intellectual property may be transferred among the servers according to the hierarchical information and disclosure extents. The information about the servers may be registered with disclosure approval conditions so that a given server may disclose only approved intellectual property pieces. The servers may be connected to one another through networks.

Further, according to an embodiment of a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is also provided a distribution method for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, comprising the steps of registering intellectual property, users, and services available to the users; providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and automatically distributing the intellectual property.

In addition, according to an embodiment of a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a distribution method of distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, the method comprising the steps of registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users; providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and automatically distributing the intellectual property.

Reference will now be made, by way of example only, to the accompanying drawings, in which:

15

Fig. 1 is a diagram schematically showing an example of a system LSI;

20 Fig. 2 is a diagram conceptionally showing a system for distributing intellectual property embodying the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram schematically showing an example of a system for distributing intellectual property embodying the present invention;

25 Fig. 4 is a block diagram schematically showing an example of a system configuration according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is a block diagram showing an important part of a system (system for distributing intellectual property) embodying the present invention;

30 Fig. 6 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of processes carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

35 Figs. 7A and 7B are diagrams schematically showing an example of a display screen used when carrying out registration, update, and deletion processes in a system embodying the present invention;

Figs. 8A, 8B, and 8C are diagrams schematically

showing an example of a display screen used when carrying out a retrieval process in a system embodying the present invention;

5 Fig. 9 is a block diagram schematically showing two servers in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 10 is a diagram for explaining operations of the two servers shown in Fig. 9;

10 Fig. 11 is a diagram for explaining an example of a SGML data processing in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 12 is a diagram schematically showing a structure of intellectual property, in particular, semiconductor design property handled by a system embodying the present invention;

15 Fig. 13 is a diagram showing examples of the intellectual property;

Fig. 14 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a category conversion process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

20 Fig. 15 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a comparison displaying process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

25 Fig. 16 is a diagram schematically showing an example of a display screen used when carrying out a comparison displaying process in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 17 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a catalog information entering process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

30 Fig. 18 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of intellectual property suitably provided for each development stage by a system embodying the present invention;

35 Fig. 19 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a process of setting a disclosure extent and a mask in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 20 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of server information handled by a system embodying the present

invention;

Fig. 21 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of an approval process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

5 Fig. 22 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a retrieval process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 23 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a mailing process carried out in a system embodying the present
10 invention;

Fig. 24 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a displaying process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

15 Fig. 25 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a logging process carried out in a system embodying the present invention;

Fig. 26 is a diagram dynamically showing various processes carried out in a system embodying the present invention; and

20 Fig. 27 is a diagram schematically showing a server and a storage medium installed in a system embodying the present invention.

25 For a better understanding of the preferred embodiments of the present invention, previously considered technology and the problems thereof will be explained.

30 Improvements in semiconductor technology are drastically increasing the circuit scale of semiconductor products. For example, system LSIs with 20 million transistors employing 0.25- μm design rules are being mass-produced.

35 There are system ASICs (application specific integrated circuits) having a general-purpose microprocessor or an ASSP (application specific standard product), peripheral logic circuits, memories, a communication protocol processor, and an I/O bus interface integrated into a single chip. System LSIs

mentioned in this specification cover system ASICs, MPUs, and ASSPs.

The system LSIs are provided with circuit blocks containing a core, memories, and peripheral circuits according to required functions. The increased integration and complicated functions raise a problem in the system LSIs of increasing the number of processes and the duration of development. To solve the problem, the distribution of ASSPs is changing from individual chip distribution to intellectual property distribution.

Figure 1 shows a multimedia LSI, which is one of the system LSIs.

The LSI 1 comprises a DSP (digital signal processor) block 11, an MPEG (Motion Picture Expert Group) block 12, and an ATM (asynchronous transfer mode) block 13. These blocks 11, 12, and 13 are provided in the form of intellectual property.

To obtain intellectual property, one may get a printed catalog first, an explanation about detailed specifications second, and then circuit data stored in an electronic medium such as a floppy disk.

Many steps and a long time are needed to get intellectual property. This hinders the reuse of intellectual property and the development of system LSIs.

An _____ apparatus and system for distributing intellectual property, in particular semiconductor design property, according to an embodiment of the present invention will now be explained.

Figure 2 conceptually shows a system for distributing intellectual property embodying the present invention.

As shown in Fig. 2, according to an embodiment of the present _____ invention, intellectual property (IP) information for a DSP core (block), MPEG core, ATM core, and the like can be distributed around the world by using the internet and intranets. Namely, a distribution system (IP Highway system) embodying the present invention can automatically _____

distribute IP information on a server in one office to servers in other offices using open server communication technologies.

Figure 3 is a general view showing an example of the 5 intellectual property distribution system embodying the present invention applied to, as an example, F company. The system includes an internet IH ("IH" represents "intellectual property highway") server 100 of the F company, internet IH servers 101, 102, 103, and the like 10 of other companies connected to the server 100 through the Internet 110, firewalls 120 and 130, an intranet IH server 200 of the F company, intranet IH servers 210, 220, and 230 provided for divisions of the F company, 15 intranet servers 231 and 232 provided for project teams of the F company, a server 233 for a specific customer, a private line 140, the specific customer 234, a manager 240, and a user 250.

The IH servers are capable of transmitting pieces of 20 intellectual property at high speed. In this embodiment, the intellectual property is semiconductor design property related to cores (megacells), circuit libraries, and software parts for microprocessors for built-in devices. Each piece of intellectual property consists of 25 a catalog, contents, a stamp, and design data. The catalog shows the provider, functions, specifications, and business conditions of the intellectual property. The contents include data sheets, bug and update information, and questions and answers related to the intellectual property. The stamp indicates the 30 registration date, disclosure extent, and the number of references to the intellectual property. The design data is expressed in Verilog-HDL (hardware description language), VHDL (VHSIC hardware description language), or GDSII.

35 The distribution system connects the IH servers to one another through the Internet 110 to share intellectual property for system LSIs in real time. The

server 100 is provided for each company or each office to collect information about intellectual property and disclose its own intellectual property worldwide.

5 The server 200 serves as a parent intranet server of the F company, to collect information about intellectual property through the F company and provide users in the F company with the collected information so that the users may efficiently utilize intellectual property worldwide. The server 200 transfers intellectual property among the
10 child servers 210, 220, and the like.

15 The child servers 210, 220, and the like are provided for divisions of the F company, respectively, to transfer intellectual property among them. Any child server (230 in Fig. 3) may have grandchild intranet servers 231 and 232, which are connected to project teams of the F company, respectively. The child server 230 is connected to the specific customer server 233 through the firewall 130. The server 233 may be connected to a server of the specific customer 234 through the private
20 line 140. The distribution system of the present invention is achievable in various ways. The child intranet servers, grandchild intranet servers, specific customer servers, etc., are not always necessary for the system of the present invention.

25 Figure 4 schematically shows an example of a system configuration according to an embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in Fig. 4, a plurality of IH servers, IP users, and IP providers are included in the distribution system. The IP users and IP providers are connected by
30 using a http (Hyper-Text Transfer Protocol) through a httpd server in the F company IH server. Note that the IP user registers IP outlines into a database of the F company IH server by using the http, and the IP user retrieves and refers the IP outlines stored in the data
35 base by using the http. In the database of the F company IH server, design data, know how, Q & A (questions and answers), use records, and update data are also stored.

In Fig 4, CORBA (Common Object Request Broker Architecture) is used between servers. Namely, LSI designers (IP users) can retrieve IP information on-demand using the system's high-performance search technologies. Further, standard technologies, which are easy for many companies to use, are employed for the server communication. For example, a SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language) format is used for communication records, and the CORBA method is used for server communication. In addition, search engines employ a classification method for IP items and a comparison method for IP information, that are searched.

Figure 5 shows an essential part of a distribution system embodying the present invention, and Fig. 6 shows processes carried out in the server 210 of the division A of the F company. The server 210 is connected to the server 200 through a LAN (local area network).

A server-client process will be explained with reference to Fig. 6.

In step S11, the manager 240 registers control information and user information in the server 210. Namely, the manager 240 registers server control data such as a server name, the necessity of approval when disclosing data, data transfer timing, data retention period, a manager name, a group name, user names, and services provided. In steps S12, S13, and S14, a user 250 refers to the registered data when registering and retrieving a piece of intellectual property from and through the server 210.

If approved, the user 250 may change a password and the disclosure extent of an intellectual property piece stored in the server 210. The user 250 may register, update, delete, retrieve, refer to, and extract an intellectual property piece from and through the server 210.

Figures 7A and 7B show an example of a display screen used when registering, updating, and deleting an

intellectual property piece and changing the disclosure extent of an intellectual property piece in the system of the present invention.

Figures 8A, 8B, and 8C show an example of a display screen used when retrieving, registering, updating, and deleting intellectual property and changing the disclosure extent of intellectual property.

The examples of Figs. 7A to 8C handle intellectual property related to MPEG2 and SPARC (registered trade mark).

Figure 9 schematically shows two servers in a distribution system embodying the present invention, and Fig. 10 is a diagram for explaining operations of the two servers shown in Fig. 9. In Figs. 9 and 10, only two servers 20 and 30 are described in order to easily and simply explain the operations therebetween, however, a plurality of servers are included in the distribution system and connected by using the Internet and intranets in practice.

As shown in Figs. 9 and 10, each server 20, 30 comprises a processing portion 21, 22, a memory portion 22, 32, and a communication portion 23, 33, respectively. The memory portion 22, 32 is used to register intellectual property, users, and services available for the users; the processing portion 21, 31, which is connected to the memory portion 22, 32, is used to provide a user with a service allowed for the user; and the communication portion 23, 33, which is connected to the processing portion, is used to automatically distribute the intellectual property.

In the following explanation, the server 20 is a transferring request server (client) requesting intellectual property (IP information), and the server 30 is a data storing server storing the IP information. Note that, in the distribution system, a data transferring process (transferring IP information) is started and carried out in accordance with a transferring

request of the client (transferring request server 20). Further, for example, CORBA (Common Object Request Broker Architecture) is used for transferring data between servers in the intranets, and FTP (File Transfer Protocol) is used for transferring data between servers in the Internet, by considering security and efficiency of the data transferring process. CORBA is a standard communication architecture between distributed objects in the intranets, FTP is a standard file transferring protocol in the Internet, and CORBA and FTP are open server communication technologies.

As shown in Fig. 10, in the transferring request server 20, the processing portion 21 issues a transferring request for IP information and receives the IP information through the communication portion 23; and the IP information received by the processing portion 21 is stored in the memory portion (IP database) 22. The processing portion 21 corresponds to a central processing unit, application software for distributing IP information, and the like, and the memory portion 22 corresponds to a hard disk device, optical disk device, and the like.

On the other hand, in the data storing server 30, the processing portion 31 acknowledges the transferring request for IP information, checks the rights of the transferring request server (client) 20, and then, transfers the IP information, which is stored in the memory portion (IP database) 32, to the transferring request server 20 through the communication portion 33.

The IP information is transferred from the data storing server 30 to the transferring request server 20 in SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language) format.

Figure 11 is a diagram for explaining an example of SGML data processing in a system embodying the present invention.

As shown in Figs. 10 and 11, the server (data storing server 30) transfers the IP information to the

client (transferring request server 20) in SGML format. Namely, in a register/extract process of the data storing server 30, IP information is extracted from the IP database (32), and further, in a data conversion process of the data storing server 30, the IP information is converted to a transferring record format in SGML format. Further, in a data transfer process of the data storing server 30, the IP information converted to SGML format is transferred to the client (transferring request server 20) through the communication portion 33 of the data storing server 30.

Note that, in the above description, the transferring record format is specified in SGML format, but the transferring record format can be determined in HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) document form (HTML format), XML (Extensible Markup Language) format, and the like.

Figure 12 shows the structure of intellectual property, in particular, semiconductor design property, handled by a system embodying the present invention.

Step S21 maintains original intellectual property. Each piece of the intellectual property consists of a catalog, contents, and circuit design data. Step S22 registers intellectual property information based on the intellectual property. Hereinafter, the intellectual property information is referred to as the IP information. Step S23 prepares catalog retrieval data from the IP information, and step S26 retrieves a necessary piece of intellectual property according to the catalog retrieval data. Step S24 prepares an HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) document from the IP information, and step S27 refers the intellectual property according to the HTML document. Step S25 prepares circuit data from the IP information, and step S28 reuses the circuit data to develop LSIs.

Figure 13 shows examples of the intellectual property.

As shown in Fig. 13, the intellectual property (IP information) includes, for example, a processor/DSP, application having special function, interface/peripheral function, and analog function, etc. As shown in Fig. 13,
5 the IP information for the processor/DSP includes SPARClite FR, Hyperit (DSP), ARC, and OAK; and the IP information for the interface/peripheral functions includes PCI, AGP, SCSI, USB, IEEE1394, PCMCIA, VGA, HDLC, UART, and the like. Further, as shown in Fig. 13,
10 the IP information for the application having special function includes AC-3, MPEG Audio, MPEG2 Video, NTSC Enc., JPEG; Viterbi Dec., Huffman Read-Solomon Decoder, DVB Descrambler, DES, STB SAR; ATM25 Framer, and the like; and the IP information for the analog function,
15 etc. includes OpAmp, AD/DA, RAMDAC, and the like. Note that the above described kinds for the IP information are only examples.

Tables 1 to 4 show an example of a catalog of intellectual property. "IP" represents "intellectual property" in the following tables and descriptions.
20

Table 1

Level	Data item	Bytes	Range	Notes (initial value, redefinition, etc.)
5	1 IP ID	256	0 < x	
	1 IP name	256	Optional character string	Optionally entered by user
	1 Company	256	Managed by master	Registrant company name at registration
	2 Division	256	Managed by master	Registrant division name at registration
	1 Function	--	--	
	2 Function1	256	Managed by master	One selected at registration and having conversion table function
10	3 Function2	256	Managed by master	One selected at registration and having conversion table function
	4 Function3	256	Managed by master	One selected at registration and having conversion table function
	2 Others	256	Optional character string	Described if not in categories
	2 Bit	4	0 < x	Unit: bit
	2 Cache size	4	0 < x	Unit: KB
	2 Memory	--	--	
15	3 Bit	4	0 < x	
	3 Word	4	0 < x	
	2 Port configuration	256	Optional character string	
	2 Function option	256	Optional character string	
	2 Compliance standard	256	Optional character string	
	2 Equivalent product	256	Optional character string	
20	2 FIFO size	4	0 < x	
	2 Channel count	4	0 < x	
	2 Multiplier	8	0 < x	
	2 Resolution	8	0 < x	
	2 Note	1024	Optional character string	

Table 2

	1	Market	--	--	Plurality selectable
5	2	Market1	256	Managed by master	
		Market2	256	Managed by master	
	2	Others	256	Managed by master	
10	1	Specification	--	--	
	2	Calculation (max.)	8	0 < x	Unit: MIPS, MOPS, SPECint, MFLOPS
	2	Clock frequency	--	--	
	3	Clock frequency (min.)	8	0 < x	Unit: MHz
	3	Clock frequency (typ.)	8	0 < x	Unit: MHz
	3	Clock frequency (max.)	8	0 < x	Unit: MHz
15	2	Access time (min.)	8	0 < x	Unit: ns
	2	Transmission rate	8	0 < x	Unit: Mbps, Kbps, bps, Mbyte/s
	2	Frequency band	--	--	
	3	Frequency band (min.)	8	0 < x	Unit: KHz, MHz, GHz
	3	Frequency band (max.)	8	0 < x	Unit: KHz, MHz, GHz
	2	Lockup time (min.)	8	0 < x	Unit: ns
20	2	Jitter attribute (max.)	8	0 < x	Unit: dB
	2	S/N ratio (max.)	8	0 < x	Unit: dB
	2	Gain (max.)	8	0 < x	
	2	Power consumption	--	--	
	3	Running	--	--	
	4	Typ.	8	0 < x	Unit: mW
25	4	Max.	8	0 < x	Unit: mW
	3	Standby	8	0 < x	Unit: mW
	2	Note	1024	Optional character string	

Table 3

1	Physical specification	--	--	
2	Gate size	4	0 < x	Unit: gates
5	2 Gate size (Note)	32	Optional character string	
	2 Area size	32	Optional character string	
	2 Signal pin counts	--	--	
10	3 Total pin	4	0 < x	
	3 Input pin	4	0 < x	
	3 Output pin	4	0 < x	
	3 Test pin	4	0 < x	
	1 Operation condition	--	--	
	2 Supply voltage	8	x (minus value allowed)	Plurality, unit: V
15	2 Tj	--	--	
	3 Tj (min.)	8	x (minus value allowed)	Unit: °C
	3 Tj (max.)	8	x (minus value allowed)	Unit: °C
	2 Signal level	--	--	
	3 Signal level (min.)	8	x (minus value allowed)	Unit: V
	3 Signal level (max.)	8	x (minus value allowed)	Unit: V
20	3 Note	32	Optional character string	
	1 Target technology	--	--	Plurality
	2 ASIC vendor name	256	Managed by master	
	3 Technology code	256	Managed by master	
25	1 CAD tool	--	--	Plurality
	2 Tool name	256	Managed by master	
	2 Others	256	Optional character string	

Table 4

	1	Deliverable	--	--	
	2	VSI compliance	4	1, 0	1: Yes, 2: No
5	2	Deliverable level	256	Optional character string	Plurality allowed
	3	Model type	256	Optional character string	
	3	Revision	256	Optional character string	
	3	URL	256	Optional character string	
	2	Others	256	Optional character string	
10	1	Options	--	--	
	2	System development environment	256	Optional character string	
	2	Soft (hard, firm)	256	Optional character string	
	2	Qualification level	256	Optional character string	
	2	Evaluation model	4	1, 0	1: Yes, 2: No
15	1	Business condition	--	--	
	2	Internal	10	Year	1998/---/--
	2	Public	10	Year	1998/---/--
	2	Target user	256	Optional character string	
	2	Contract condition	256	Optional character string	
20	1	User support	--	--	
	2	Internal	--	--	
	3	Inquiry	256	Optional character string	
	3	Telephone	32	Optional character string	
	3	E-mail	256	Optional character string	
25	3	Fax	32	Optional character string	
	2	External	--	--	
	3	Inquiry	256	Optional character string	
	3	Telephone	32	Optional character string	
	3	E-mail	256	Optional character string	
30	3	Fax	32	Optional character string	

In Tables 1 to 4, an IP ID consists of four bytes, and an IP name consists of 256 bytes and is optionally entered by user. A large function category Function 1 consists of 256 bytes and is selected at registration. A bit width Bit consists of four bytes. IP IDs must follow international specifications.

Tables 5 to 7 show examples of the contents of a catalog of an MPU.

Table 5

	IP ID	IP ID	00001@ed.xxx
	IP name	IP name	F SPARC831
5	Company name	Company name	xxx
	Division name	Division name	Electronics device section) LS division) system 1
	Application field	Large category	
		Small category	
		Other categories	
	Function	Large category	MPU
		Medium category	32 bits
		Small category	
		Other categories	
10	Memory configuration	Bit width	32 bits
		Cache capacity	
		Bit	4000
		Word	2000
		Number of ports	
		Function option	BIU
		Standards	
		Equivalent	SPARC V8E core (MB86831)
		Number of FIFO stages	
		Number of channels	
		Multiplication number	
		Resolution	
		Others	
	Performance	Operation performance (max.)	
		Operation performance (max.) unit	66 MOPS

Table 6

5	Operation frequency	Operation frequency (min.)	
		Operation frequency (typ.)	
		Operation frequency (max.)	66 MHz
		Access time (min.)	
		Transfer rate (max.)	
		Transfer rate (max.) unit	
10	Frequency band	Frequency band (min.)	
		Frequency band (min.) unit	
		Frequency band (max.)	
		Frequency band (max.) unit	
		Lockup time (min.)	
		Jitter attribute (max.)	
		S/N ratio (max.)	
		Gain (max.)	
10	Power consumption	Power consumption (typ.)	
		Power consumption (max.)	
		Standby	
		Others	
10	External specifications	Gate size	
		Gate size (reference)	
		Area size	3.6 x 4.0 mm ²
10	Number of signal terminals	Total	
		Input terminals	
		Output terminals	
		Testing terminals	
		Others	
10	Operating conditions	Source voltage	3.3 V

Table 7

5	TJ	Tj (min.)	
		Tj (max.)	
	Signal level	Signal level (min.)	
		Signal level (max.)	
		Others	
	Corresponding technology	LSI vendor name	Hard macro
		Technology code	CS60ALE
		Others	
	CAD tool	Tool name	
		Others	
10	Providing information	VSI standard	
		Distribution level	
		Data type	
		Data version	
		URL	http://www.lld.ed.xxx.co.jp/macro/
		Others	
	Additional information	Development environment	
		Software (driver, firm)	GNU, C compiler
		Quality level	Operation evaluation by general-purpose chip (MB86831)
		Evaluation sample (evaluation board)	Evaluation board for MB863x is available
		Others	
15	Business conditions	In-house presentation time	Presented
		Outside presentation time	
		Target user	ASIC users of F company
		Contract conditions	
		Others	
	User support	In-house contact address	
		In-house telephone	
		In-house e-mail address	
		In-house fax	
		Outside contact address	
		Outside telephone	
		Outside e-mail address	
		Outside fax	

In Tables 5 to 7, an IP ID is "00001@ed.xxx" and an IP name is "F SPARC831." A large category of "Function" is MPU. A bit width of "Memory configuration" is 32. In this way, a catalog is prepared for each piece of

5 intellectual property and is used for retrieval.

Tables 8 to 10 show categories (category information). The categories include a company name, a division name, an application field of the intellectual property, a function of the intellectual property, and

10 the like. For example, the company name is F company, and the division name is one of the divisions A, B, and C.

Table 8 shows examples of the contents of categories for "Application field."

Table 8

Large category	Small category
PC	Desktop Note NC HPC Others
5 PC peripheral	Keyboard Mouse Printer PC board CRT Others
Mobile communication	PDC PHS CDMA Others
ITS	Car navigation system Others
Network	Others
Consumer	STB DVC DSC Game Others
10 File	DVD OD HDD Others

In table 8, the large category of "Application field" includes PCs (personal computers), peripheral devices, and mobile communication devices. The small category of the same includes desktop PCs, note PCs,
5 keyboards, mice, personal digital cellular (PDC) phones, and personal handy phone systems (PHSs).

Tables 9 and 10 show examples of the contents of categories for "Function."

Table 9

Large category	Medium category	Small category
MPU	16 bits 32 bits Others	
MCU	16 bits 32 bits Others	
DSP	16-bit fixed point	
	20-bit fixed point	
	24-bit floating point	
	32-bit floating point	
Primitive macro	Data path	DCT/IDCT FPU ALU Multiplier Others
	I/O macro	PGI GTL LVTTL CTT LVDS LCD driver Others

Table 10

Primitive macro	Mixed signal	AD/DA Op. amp. Comparator Analog switch Reference voltage Others
	Memory	SRAM DRAM Flash RAM ROM Others
	Others	FIFO PLL/VCO 1H delay line
MPR	Interface/peripheral	PCI USB IEEE1394 PCMCIA SCSII IrDA Parallel port UART Timer DMAC 12CBus Others
	Network	Ethernet ATM XDSL EDDI Others
		Others

In Tables 9 and 10, the large category of "Function" includes MPUs, DSPs, and primitive macros, and the medium category of the same includes 16 bits, 32 bits, 20-bit fixed point, 32-bit floating point, I/O macros, and memories. For the I/O macros and memories in the medium category of "Function," there are small categories including PCIs, GTLs, SRAMs, and DRAMs.

According to category information such as a company name, division name, application field, and function, catalog information about intellectual property pieces is registered and processed with the use of a menu screen.

Figure 14 is a diagram for explaining an example of a category conversion process carried out in a system embodying the present invention. In Fig. 14, reference numeral 31 denotes a management system (first management system) for F company, and 32 denotes a management system (second management system) for M company.

As shown in Fig. 14, the F company employs the first management system 31, the M company employs the second management system 32, and these management systems 31 and 32 differ from each other. Step S31 registers intellectual property under the first management system 31 of the F company. Step S33 converts the registered intellectual property according to category information maintained in step S32 into one handled by the second management system 32 of the M company. Note that step S34 registers category information in step S32 (memory portion).

Namely, a distribution system embodying the present invention converts the category of a given piece of intellectual property according to category information into a category that is suitable for another management environment. In general, the first management system 31 of the F company includes a plurality of servers, and category information is the same in the servers included in the first management system 31. Similarly, the second management system 32 of the M company includes a

plurality of servers, and category information is the same in the servers included in the second management system 32. Nevertheless, the category information of the first management system 31 may be different from that of the second management system 32. Concretely, for example, a large category "MPU" is used in the first management system 31 and a large category "micro processor" is used in the second management system 32, when the IP information is transferred from the first management system 31 to the second management system 32, the large category "MPU" of the first management system 31 is converted to the large category "micro processor" of the second management system 32 (S33), in accordance with the category information (S32) which includes convert information from the first management system 31 to the second management system 32 and is previously registered (S35).

Figure 15 is a diagram for use in explaining an example of a comparison displaying process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

In the distribution system, step S1 registers IP information (intellectual property), and step S2 maintains retrieval information (catalog retrieval data) from the IP information. Step S3 analyzes (categorizes) the IP information in accordance with the catalog retrieval data, and step S4 maintains the catalog database. Step S5 retrieves a necessary piece of intellectual property according to a retrieval condition input by the user (S401) and displays the result for the user. Step S6 registers comparing item information according to comparing items input by the user (S402), and step S7 displays the compared results (IP catalog) with indicating to the user (S403).

Figure 16 schematically shows an example of a display screen used when carrying out a comparison displaying process in a system embodying the present invention.

As shown in Fig. 16, in the display screen used when carrying out a comparison displaying process (S403 of Fig. 15), items (company name, IP name, function, transfer rate, distribution level (disclosure extent),
5 reference, and URL) for IP information are displayed by comparing manner. In Fig. 16, three intellectual properties (NAME: AIC-xxx, MDxxx, and MBxxx) are listed (displayed) with comparing catalog values (items) thereof. Note that these items are previously registered
10 by the user (S402 of Fig. 15). Namely, as described above with reference to Figs. 15 and 16, the catalog is processed and stored in the memory portion (S4), and when a plurality of intellectual properties are obtained as a retrieval result, these intellectual properties are
15 displayed by comparing items therebetween. Note that the items are determined by the user.

Figure 17 shows an example of a catalog information entering process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

20 To register catalog information such as the one shown in Tables 5 to 7 for a given piece of intellectual property, step S45 displays a catalog registration menu to let a user select a batch input operation or a menu input operation.

25 If the batch input operation is selected, step S42 carries out the batch input operation according to a fixed text form such as an SGML form or a CSV form prepared in step S41 and category information stored in a category database maintained in step S43. If the menu
30 input operation is selected, step S44 carries out the menu input operation according to the category information maintained in step S43 and the menus of Figs. 7A and 7B. Step S46 registers the input catalog information in a database according to categories. The catalog information of Tables 5 to 7 is of an
35 intellectual property piece having the name of "F SPARC831." Various pieces of catalog information are

prepared for many intellectual property pieces and are registered in the catalog database in step S46.

Figure 18 shows an example of intellectual property suitably provided for each development stage by a system embodying the present invention.

Circuit design data required to develop a semiconductor product differs depending on development stages thereof, as shown in Table 11. Accordingly, a distribution system embodying the present invention holds circuit data for every development stage of semiconductor devices so that a user may retrieve necessary circuit data according to a development stage. An embodiment of the present invention holds registration rules for circuit data so that users may register circuit data according to the rules without mistakes.

Table 11 shows relationships between data types and distribution levels (development stages), and Table 12 shows data types and corresponding expression forms and contents.

Table 11

5	Distribution level (Development stage)	Spec.	High	Logical		Physical	
	Data type	Architecture	Behavior	RTL + script	Net list	Layout	Mask
10	Design data	Document	0	0	0	0	0
		C/C++	0	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
		Behavior		0	Δ	Δ	Δ
		RTL			0	Δ	Δ
		Synthetic script			0	Δ	Δ
		Net list				0	0
		Simulation data	0	0	0	0	0
		Test data			0	0	0
		Floor plan data				0	Δ
		Layout data				0	Δ
		Timing data			Δ	0	0
		R/C data				0	Δ
		Mask data				Δ	0

0: Necessary

Δ: Desirable

Table 12

	Data type	Expression	Contents
5	Catalog	Text	Characteristics (writer name, IP form, etc.)
	Contents	HTML (text, graphics, and tables)	Functional outline, directions for use, and uses
	Document	HTML or text depending on word processor software	Detailed specifications
	C/C++	C, C++	
	Behavior	VHDL	
10	RTL	VHDL, Verilog-HDL	
	Synthetic script	Depending on tools	
	Net list	VHDL, Verilog-HDL, EDIF	
	Simulation data	VHDL, Verilog-HDL, C, C++	Function check data
	Test data	FTDL, VHDL, Verilog- HDL	
15	Floor plan data	PDEF	
	Layout data	DEF	Layout and wiring data
	Timing data	SDF	Delay and setup hold
	R/C data	SPF, SPICE	Capacitance and resistance
	Mask data	GDS II	

In Table 11, design data (circuit data) includes documents, net lists, layout data, and mask data that are dependent on development stages. In Table 12, documents are expressed in HTML and text to describe detailed specifications. The layout data relates to the layout and wiring of elements.

Developing a system LSI involves, for example, a study stage, specification-level design stage, high-level design stage, logical-level design stage, and physical-level design stage. The study stage needs the catalog and contents of intellectual property such as functions, qualities, and providers. The specification-level design stage needs documents about architecture evaluation (specification simulation) and detailed specifications in C/C++. The high-level design stage needs documents, behavior, and simulation data for system verification (operation simulation and operation synthesis). The logical-level design stage needs net lists and test data for logical verification (RTL simulation, logical synthesis, test synthesis, chip design planning, gate level simulation, and timing analysis). The physical-level design stage needs documents, net lists, simulation data, test data, floor plan data, layout data, timing data, R/C data, and mask data for packaging/chip variation (layout, automatic timing adjustment, and test pattern automatic generation).

In an embodiment of the present invention, these pieces of data are included in intellectual property so that a user may selectively acquire data necessary for each development stage.

Figure 19 shows an example of a process of setting disclosure extent and mask in a system embodying the present invention.

A piece of intellectual property may be for a project controlled by the server 231 (Fig. 3), the division controlled by the server 210, the company controlled by the server 200, the specific customer

controlled by the server 234, or a customer controlled by the server 101. Depending on these servers and customers, each piece of intellectual property has a different distribution extent.

5 In Fig. 19, step S62 registers disclosure extent information for each user group. Step S64 registers disclosure mask information to specify masked items for each intellectual property piece. Step S61 registers a piece of intellectual property, and step S63 attaches a disclosure extent and mask to the intellectual property piece according to the disclosure extent information registered in step S62 and the mask information registered in step S64. Step S65 maintains the 10 intellectual property having the disclosure extent and mask. Step S66 provides a user with the intellectual 15 property according to the disclosure extent and mask and a group to which the user belongs. For example, a disclosure extent registered in the server 230 (Fig. 3) of the division C controls the extent of disclosure of 20 hierarchically lower servers such as the server 231.

Figure 20 shows an example of server information handled by a system embodying the present invention.

The distribution system of Fig. 3 hierarchically arranges servers. To secure the safety and processing efficiency of intellectual property pieces, the present invention hierarchically controls the intellectual 25 property pieces among the hierarchical servers. The present invention registers, in the servers, each piece of intellectual property with the hierarchical position 30 and disclosure extent thereof. According to the registered hierarchical positions and disclosure extents, the intellectual property pieces are transferred among 35 and accumulated in the servers.

Step S71 maintains server information including disclosure extents, step S75 maintains intellectual property with disclosure extents, step S76 maintains intellectual property for offices, step S77 maintains

intellectual property for offices and divisions, and step S78 maintains intellectual property for offices, divisions, and projects. Step S72 registers in office servers (such as 200 of Fig. 3) the information and 5 intellectual property from steps S71, S75, and S76. Step S73 registers in division servers (such as 210 of Fig. 3) the information and intellectual property from steps S71, S75, and S77. Step S74 registers in project servers (such as 231 of Fig. 3) the information and intellectual 10 property from steps S71, S75, and S78.

Figure 21 shows an example of an approval process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

Intellectual property is important for companies, and therefore, disclosure thereof needs approval. A 15 distribution system embodying the present invention sets approval conditions when registering server information in servers and carries out an approval process when registering intellectual property in the servers. In Fig. 21, step S81 maintains server information with 20 approval conditions, and step S83 maintains intellectual property with approval conditions. Step S82 registers intellectual property and checks to see if the intellectual property is approved for disclosure, and step S84 maintains approved intellectual property. Any 25 piece of intellectual property is allowed to be transferred to approved servers, and any server is allowed to disclose approved intellectual property.

A right to use service through the distribution system of the present invention is controlled according 30 to a user ID and password. The distribution system involves various types of rights such as an intellectual property retrieval/reference right, intellectual property registration/update/deletion right, intellectual property record lookup right, intellectual property registration 35 approval right, and intellectual property registration user ID issuance right. Information used to control a user includes the user name, e-mail address, telephone

number, division name, company name, user ID, password, user group name, user ID registration date, user ID expiration date, disclosure approval user ID, type of the right, mail service conditions, etc., of the user.

5 Figure 22 shows an example of a retrieval process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

It is important for the distribution system to let users easily retrieve necessary pieces of intellectual property. Step S95 maintains intellectual property 10 catalogs. Step S90 displays an intellectual property retrieval screen. Step S92 narrows categories of registered intellectual property. Step S93 carries out a retrieval operation with key words (free words), and step S94 carries out a retrieval operation by specifying 15 category items.

Step S91 displays a retrieval result. Examples of screens displayed in steps S90 and S91 are shown in Figs. 8A to 8C. Examples of key words used in step S93 are company names such as F company and M company, or the 20 general names of circuits and semiconductor products such as MPU. Step S93 must accept various key words. For example, not only formal company names but also abbreviated company names must be accepted. Further, a variety of names of microprocessors and CPUs must be 25 accepted as key words so that users may retrieve necessary information with these words. An example of narrowing categories is shown in Tables 9 and 10. To narrow items in "Function" in Tables 9 and 10, the large category including MPU, MCU, MPR, etc., medium category 30 including 16 bits, 32 bits, etc., and small category including FPU, ALU, etc., are used.

Figure 23 shows an example of a mailing process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

Users want to receive latest intellectual property 35 in time. Step S101 registers a mailing condition for each user so that mail is sent to the user whenever a registration of new intellectual property is made in the

distribution system. When step S103 registers new intellectual property, step S102 automatically informs users of the new registration of intellectual property by mail according to the user information set in step S101.

5 Figure 24 shows an example of a displaying process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

Users want to easily grasp the processing states of intellectual property. Step S111 registers conditions for displaying registration, update, and deletion processes to be carried out on intellectual property. Step S114 maintains intellectual property, and step S113 carries out registration, update, deletion, and disclosure extent change processes on the intellectual property. Step S112 checks the processing situations of step S113 and displays the situations according to the display conditions set in step S111 so that users may grasp the processing situations.

10 Figure 25 shows an example of a logging process carried out in a system embodying the present invention.

15 Users want to grasp and analyze how intellectual property is used. Step S121 automatically logs and accumulates user access history and server-to-server link history, and step S122 collects the logs. Step S123 classifies the logs according to services, displays the history, and links the logs with groupware such as the worldwide web. Step S124 makes the logs public through the groupware.

20 Figure 26 dynamically shows various processes carried out in a system embodying the present invention. A first server S200 of Fig. 26 corresponds to, for example, the server 210 of Fig. 3, and a second server S300 of Fig. 26 to the server 220 of Fig. 3.

25 The server S300 carries out user registration step S301, intellectual property registration step S302, intellectual property deletion/update step S303, intellectual property disclosure control step S304, intellectual property retrieval/reference and mail

setting step S305, intellectual property collection step S306, and logging step S307. The server S300 has a storage unit such as a hard disk drive to store a user management database maintained in step S308, a registration record database maintained in step S309, a retrieval/reference record database maintained in step S310, an intellectual property service record database maintained in step S311, and an intellectual property database maintained in step S312.

Figure 27 shows a server and a storage medium for a system embodying the present invention. The server 300 may be any one of the servers shown in Fig. 3.

A program for controlling the server 300 according to the present invention is installed in a memory 302 of the server 300. The memory 302 maybe a RAM, a hard disk drive, etc. The program is provided by a supplier 310 to the server 300 through a line or a portable memory 320 such as a CD-ROM on a floppy disk.

As explained above, a distribution system embodying the present invention distributes intellectual property through the Internet or intranet so that users may receive latest intellectual property at low cost and on time.

An embodiment of the present invention prepares technical information to promote the reuse of intellectual property and the developing efficiency of system LSIs. An embodiment of the present invention enables users to easily get intellectual property such as circuit data through networks. Using an embodiment of the present invention, any user may obtain intellectual property that is most suitable for a design stage in which the user is involved.

In this way, an embodiment of the present invention can provide users with intellectual property, in particular semiconductor design property, on time and lets the users optimally share the intellectual property.

Many different embodiments of the present invention may be constructed

and it should be
understood that the present invention is not limited to
the specific embodiments described in this specification.

CLAIMS:

1. A distribution apparatus for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, comprising:

5 a memory portion for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users;

10 a processing portion, connected to the memory portion, for providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and

15 a communication portion, connected to the processing portion, for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

2. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the memory portion registers control information about the services, retrieval information about the intellectual property, and extraction information about the intellectual property.

20 3. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the intellectual property includes a catalog used when retrieving the intellectual property, contents effectively representing the intellectual property, and circuit data to be reused for designing a semiconductor product; and the registered intellectual property is processed according to the services so that the users can use the intellectual property.

25 4. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein the catalog is processed and stored in the memory portion, and when a plurality of intellectual properties are obtained as a retrieval result, these intellectual properties are displayed by comparing items therebetween.

5. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 4, wherein the items are determined by the user.

30 6. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 5, wherein the catalog is registered collectively or through a menu according to category information, and the intellectual property is processed according to the

category information.

7. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 6,
wherein the circuit data is prepared for each development
stage of semiconductor products so that a proper piece of
5 circuit data is reused for a given development stage.

8. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 7,
wherein the circuit data is registered according to
registration rules that are set in advance.

9. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 8,
10 wherein the users are divided into groups that are
related to disclosure extents; and each piece of
intellectual property is registered with a disclosure
extent so that each piece of the intellectual property is
disclosed to the users according to the disclosure
15 extent.

10. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
wherein a catalog of a given piece of intellectual
property is registered with a mask that defines a
disclosure extent of the catalog.

20 11. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim,
wherein the memory portion registers category information
for intellectual property so that the intellectual
property is distributed among different environments
according to the category information.

25 12. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 3 to 10, or
claim 11 when read as appended to any one of claims 3 to 10, wherein a retrieval
operation on the catalog is carried out by narrowing hierarchical categories related to the
catalog and by specifying key words and at least one
category item.

30 13. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim,
wherein a mailing state is registered on a specific
occasion for each user to indicate whether or not
information about the registration of intellectual
property must be sent to the user; and mail is sent to
35 the user according to the mailing state at a specific
occasion.

14. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim

13, wherein the specific occasion is the time of registering, updating and deleting the intellectual property, and the time of changing disclosure extents.

15. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein each piece of intellectual property is registered with a display condition on a specific occasion so that the intellectual property is processed and displayed according to the display condition.

10 16. A distribution apparatus as claimed in claim 15, wherein the specific occasion is the time of registering, updating and deleting the intellectual property, and the time of changing disclosure extents.

15 17. A distribution apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein a log of users who accessed the intellectual property is collected; and the log is processed and displayed according to users and is automatically linked with groupware so that the processed log is provided to the users.

20 18. A distribution apparatus for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, comprising:

a registration means for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users;

25 an execution means for providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and

a distribution means for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

19. A distribution system having at least one server for distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, wherein the server comprises:

a memory portion for registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users;

35 a processing portion, connected to the memory portion, for providing a user with a service

allowed for the user; and

a communication portion, connected to the processing portion, for automatically distributing the intellectual property.

5 20. A distribution system as claimed in claim 19, wherein the distribution system comprises a plurality of servers that are hierarchically managed; and information about the servers is registered with hierarchical information and disclosure extents so that intellectual
10 property is transferred among the servers according to the hierarchical information and disclosure extents.

15 21. A distribution system as claimed in claim 20, wherein the information about the servers is registered with disclosure approval conditions so that a given server discloses only approved intellectual property pieces.

22. A distribution system as claimed in claim 20 or 21, wherein the servers are connected to one another through networks.

20 23. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 22, wherein the memory portion registers control information about the services, retrieval information about the intellectual property, and extraction information about the intellectual property.

25 24. A distribution system as claimed in any of claims 19 to 23, wherein the intellectual property includes a catalog used when retrieving the intellectual property, contents effectively representing the intellectual property, and circuit data to be reused for designing a semiconductor
30 product; and the registered intellectual property is processed according to the services so that the users use the intellectual property.

35 25. A distribution system as claimed in claim 24, wherein the catalog is processed and stored in the memory portion, and when a plurality of intellectual properties are obtained as a retrieval result, these intellectual properties are displayed by comparing items therebetween.

26. A distribution system as claimed in claim 25,
wherein the items are determined by the user.

27. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 24 to 26,
wherein the catalog is registered collectively or through
5 a menu according to category information, and the
intellectual property is processed according to the
category information.

10 28. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 24 to 27,
wherein the circuit data is prepared for each development
stage of semiconductor products so that a proper piece of
circuit data is reused for a given development stage.

29. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 24 to 28,
wherein the circuit data is registered according to
registration rules that are set in advance.

15 30. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 24 to 29,
wherein the users are divided into groups that are
related to disclosure extents; and each piece of
intellectual property is registered with a disclosure
extent so that each piece of the intellectual property is
20 disclosed to the users according to the disclosure
extent.

25 31. A distribution system as claimed in claim 30,
wherein a catalog of a given piece of intellectual
property is registered with a mask that defines a
disclosure extent of the catalog.

30 32. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 31,
wherein the memory portion registers category information
for intellectual property so that the intellectual
property is distributed among different environments
according to the category information.

35 33. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 24 to 31, or claim
32 when read as appended to any one of claims 24 to 31, wherein a retrieval operation on
the catalog is carried out by narrowing hierarchical categories related to the
catalog and by specifying key words and at least one
category item.

34. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 33,
wherein a mailing state is registered at a specific

occasion for each user to indicate whether or not information about the registration of intellectual property must be sent to the user; and mail is sent to the user according to the mailing state at a specific occasion.

5

35. A distribution system as claimed in claim 34, wherein the specific occasion is the time of registering, updating and deleting the intellectual property, and the time of changing disclosure extents.

10

36. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 35, wherein each piece of intellectual property is registered with a display condition at a specific occasion so that the intellectual property is processed and displayed according to the display condition.

15

37. A distribution system as claimed in claim 36, wherein the specific occasion is the time of registering, updating and deleting the intellectual property, and the time of changing disclosure extents.

20

38. A distribution system as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 37, wherein a log of users who accessed the intellectual property is collected; and the log is processed and displayed according to users and is automatically linked with groupware so that the processed log is provided to the users.

25

39. A distribution method of distributing intellectual property to be reused for semiconductor product designing, comprising the steps of:

registering intellectual property, users, and services available for the users;

30

providing a user with a service allowed for the user; and

automatically distributing the intellectual property.

35

40. A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a distribution method of distributing intellectual property to be reused for

semiconductor product designing, the method comprising
the steps of:

registering intellectual property, users,
and services available for the users;

5 providing a user with a service allowed
for the user; and

automatically distributing the
intellectual property.



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Application No: GB 9902887.0
Claims searched: 1 to 40

Examiner: Julian Elbro
Date of search: 16 September 1999

Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:

UK Cl (Ed.Q): G4A (AAP, AUDB, AUXF, AUXX)

Int Cl (Ed.6): G06F 17/30, 17/60

Other: ONLINE: EPODOC INSPEC JAPIO WPI

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
X	WO 97/46950 A1 MULTEX SYSTEMS see abstract.	1, 18, 19, 39, 40
X	WO 97/22074 A1 CYBERGOLD see abstract.	1, 18, 19, 39, 40
P, X	JP 100134074 A MITSUBISHI RAYON see also WPI abstract accession no. 98-352531.	1, 18, 19, 39, 40
X	JP 090069112 A NIPPON KAIHATSU GINKOU see also WPI abstract accession no. 97-223361.	1, 18, 19, 39, 40
X	A Marken "Data structures for enterprise information", International Journal of Micrographics and Optical Technology, vol.15, no. 2, pp2-3, 1997, see especially INSPEC abstract accession no. 5612799.	1, 18, 19, 39, 40

X	Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step	A	Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
Y	Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.	P	Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
&	Member of the same patent family	E	Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.